Rockport Station Area
Transit-Oriented Village Plan

Final Report

Fall 2018

MAPC

METROPOLITAN AREA PLANNING COUNCIL

Prepared for
Town of Rockport Planning Board

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Introduction

The Town of Rockport has been proactive in planning for its future (Figure 1). This small, North Shore town (population 7,700) is known for its picturesque downtown, beaches, and well-developed artist colony. At the same time, it faces various challenges due to demographic and cultural shifts.

Rather than prepare a new comprehensive master plan as is periodically required by the Planning Board, the Board decided to identify a limited number of innovations that residents consider of particular importance to improve the quality of life in the Town. This approach revealed a particular focus on the area around the Rockport commuter rail station (Figure 2).

This study seeks to implement a plan that supports the community's vision and unlocks the area's potential. This plan is a first phase of a project that focuses on the area immediately around the station. A second phase will examine the approximately ½ mile surrounding the station. While each plan could be implemented on its own to make positive impacts, together they can maximize the benefits to the Town.

Previous Planning Efforts

This plan builds off of previous planning efforts by the Planning Board, going back to Rockport's 2011 Downtown Master Plan, which included the station area. Chief among the area's vision was an integration of a mix of uses with improved built form, especially around the station area, which lacks the historic town fabric found in other parts of the downtown. The plans noted the lack of walkability around the station as a major flaw in the area's public realm.

This plan was followed by a study of the Town's potential future demographic changes and how that could impact the community. Finally, a visioning process was recently completed that sought community feedback on a number of priorities and needs in the Town. See the Background section for additional details on these two bodies of work.

The Station Area's Future

This plan envisions the station area as a vibrant, walkable neighborhood, reminiscent of traditional New England village centers. Development will be scaled appropriately for the Town of Rockport to maintain its traditional character. The urban design will foster walkability by bringing buildings closer to the street edge and locating parking to the interior or back of lots. Traditional architecture found in the North Shore will be used to maintain character. New residences will support local businesses and help achieve the Town's goals of attracting new, young families. Well-designed open space will provide gathering spots for residents and visitors. The entire area will act as a gateway for the Town's many tourists arriving by train. Residents will have improved options for commuting to work.

The following sections provide background information that informed the plan, an illustrative plan that provides an example of how future development could occur in a manner consistent with the Town's vision, and recommendations to realize implementation.

Figure 1. Rockport (highlighted red) is located on Cape Ann, the northern end of the MAPC region.

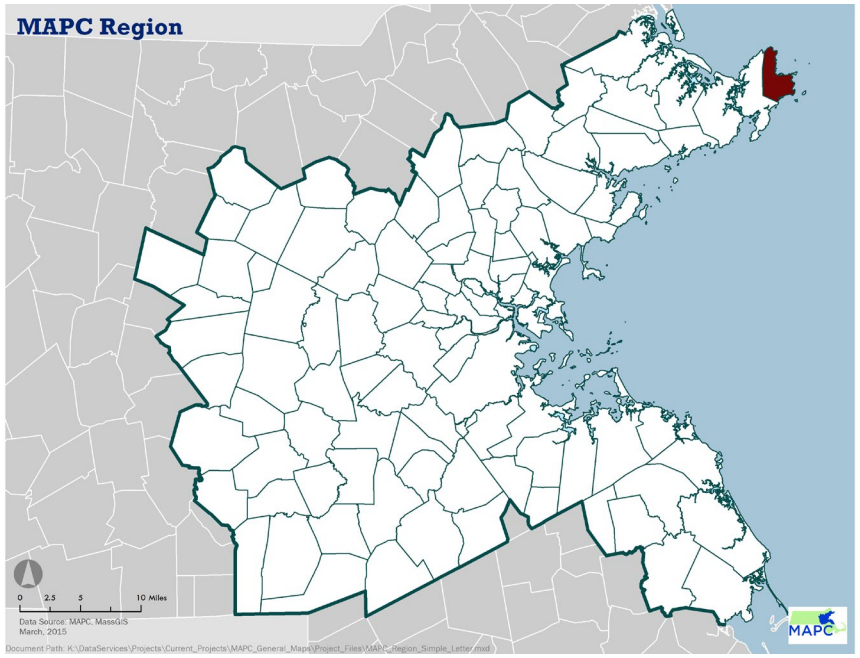
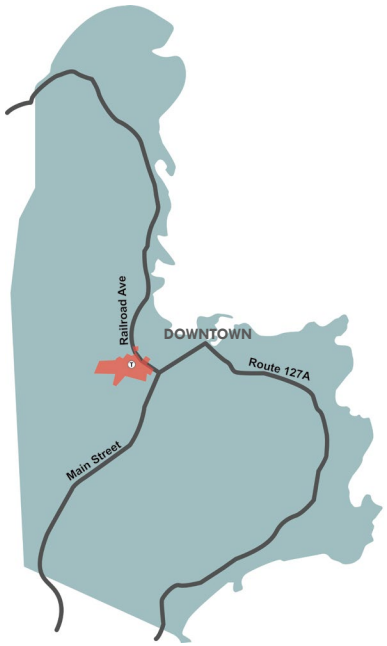


Figure 2. The station area is centrally located in Rockport, within walking distance or a short drive from downtown.



CHILDREN
HERSHEY FRAME SHOP

BACKGROUND

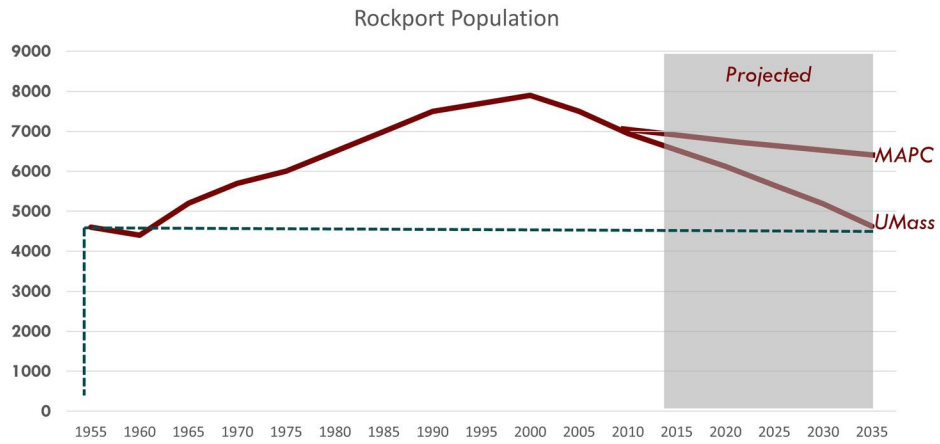
Demographic Trends and Implications

The impetus for this planning project arose from concerns of how demographic and other changes could impact Rockport's future. In 2015 the Town worked with the Donahue Institute at University of Massachusetts Boston to understand potential population and demographic changes in the Town. The overarching theme of this work was whether and how these expected changes would affect the quality of life of the Town's residents.

The work yielded several important takeaways. First, after 2000 Rockport's population started to fall and is projected to continue falling through 2035 (Figure 3). The Donahue Institute projected that by 2035 the Town's population would fall to around 4,500 (Figure 4), which was its population back in 1955.[1] MAPC's own projections show a slightly less dire projection but still a fall from the peak in 2000.[2] This drop in population can be contrasted with the state as a whole, which is projected to experience a 12% growth in population by 2035 (with the City of Boston expecting a 25% increase). Furthermore, Rockport's projected decline of 35% is among the greatest in the region, with only Hamilton matching the projected loss.

A second important conclusion from the work is that Rockport's population is expected to get older. Residents 70 years old and up is projected to comprise the largest percentage of the population. The Donahue Institute expects residents 70+ to grow by 45% and the demographic makeup of all other population cohorts are projected to fall (Figure 5).

Figure 3. Rockport's population of year-round residents is projected to continue declining, which can have negative implications for the Town.



*Excluding seasonal residents
Source: Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) *Reconnaissance Survey Town Report (1985)*; Donahue Institute, UMass, *Long-term Population Projections for Massachusetts Regions and Municipalities (2015)*; MAPC *Population Projections*

[1] As part of this plan, MAPC reviewed its own projections for Rockport. Because certain aspects of the methodology differed between the Donahue Institute and MAPC, the resulting projections were not exactly the same. Nevertheless, the overall themes were largely consistent.

[2] MAPC has prepared a dynamic model of future population, household size, and housing demand for Metro Boston and its municipalities. MAPC's projections include two scenarios for regional growth. Each scenario reflects different assumptions about key trends. The "Status Quo" scenario is based on the continuation of existing rates of births, deaths, migration, and housing occupancy. Alternatively, the "Stronger Region" scenario explores how changing trends could result in higher population growth, greater housing demand, and a substantially larger workforce. MAPC's projections showed 2030 population figures in Rockport of 6,270 and 6,422 from the Status Quo and Stronger Region scenarios, respectively.

Figure 4. According to Rockport's previous study, projected population loss is among the highest in the state.

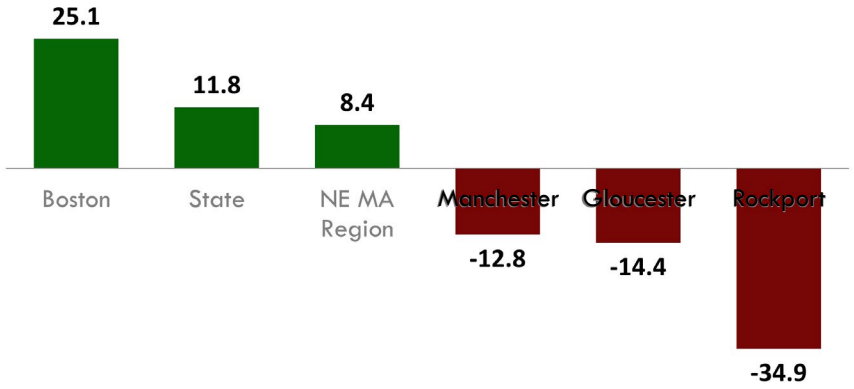
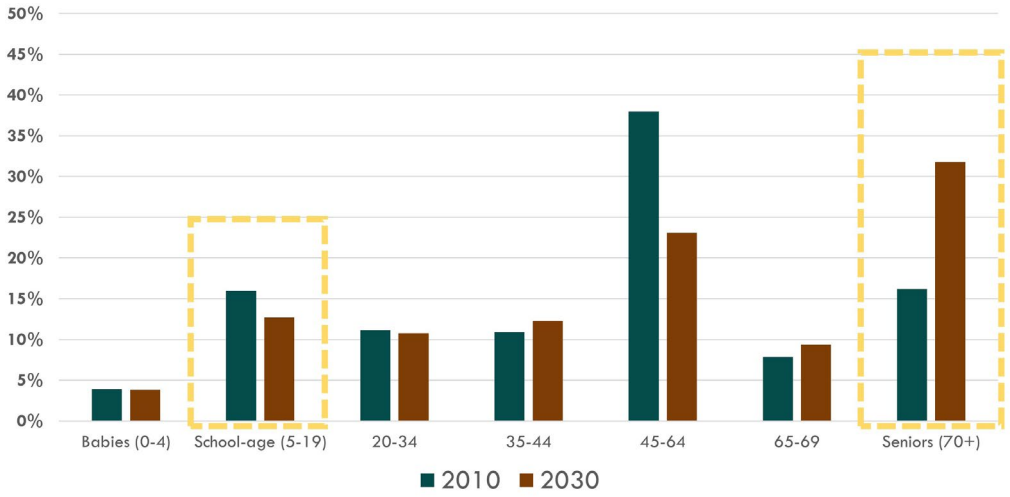


Figure 5. By 2030, school-age children are projected to decrease, while age 70+ is expected to greatly increase.



*To stop decline and restore to 2010 level by 2035, Rockport needs to add 16 young adults and 27 children per year

Source: MAPC

The Donahue Institute study noted a number of root causes for the projected changes, a number of which are macro trends that affect to some degree all communities in the region (e.g., the aging population). Regardless of whether the problems affect multiple communities, the implications can negatively affect Rockport. Some of the possible implications:

- Closing of local schools, which are then merged with adjacent towns
- Decreased demand for businesses that provide services to year-round residents
- An increase in the number of wealthy, part-time residents
- Teardown of existing housing, especially smaller, affordable housing stock, in favor of an increase in large-scale "McMansions"

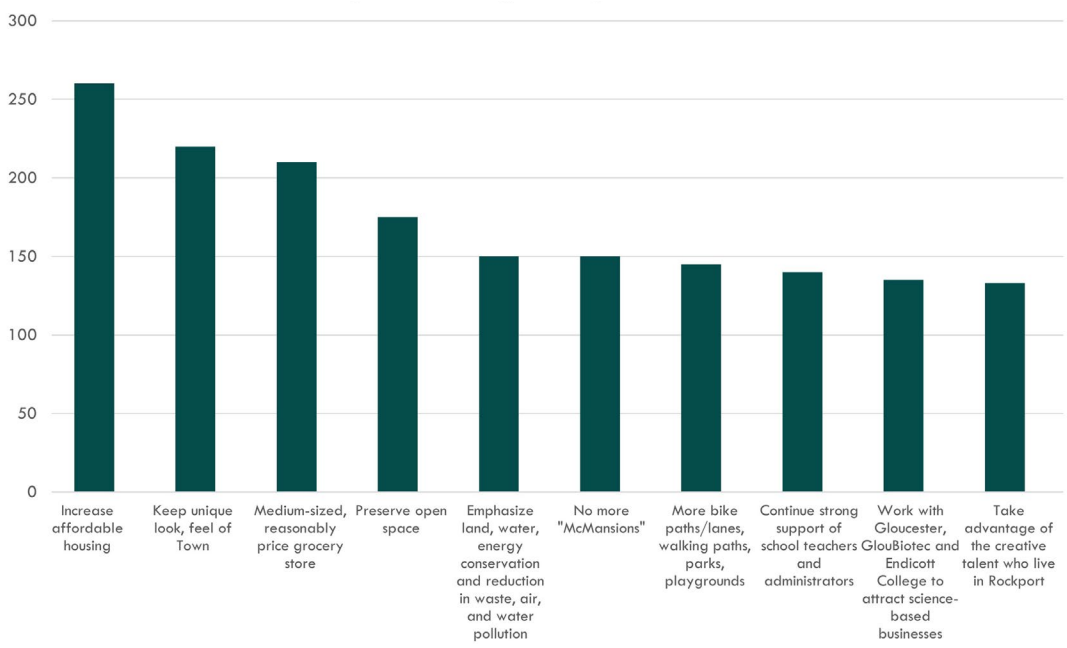
Town-wide Visioning Process

With these demographic changes and its implications in mind, the Town began a visioning process in 2016 with MAPC to develop town-wide goals (Figure 6). Whereas the work with the Donahue Institute diagnosed the problem, the visioning process was intended to provide direction on solutions. The process involved conducting surveys, which received well over 400 responses, both multiple choice as well as free-form questions. A number of the top ten highest votes for Rockport's priorities were relevant to informing this plan.

The top priority according to the survey was increasing the amount of affordable housing in Rockport.[3] This was followed by a desire to keep the unique look and feel of the Town. Other priorities included the need for a medium-sized grocery store (the Town's previous grocery store closed in 2011), preserving open space, limiting the building of "McMansions," adding more pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, and increasing energy conservation.

Many residents commented on the need to attract more young families to the Town, underscoring the Donahue Institute's projections. Suggestions ranged from widening the types of housing available in Town to improving schools.

Figure 6. Top priorities according to Rockport's 2016-2017 Visioning survey. This plan seeks to help address many of these priorities.


300
250
200
150
100
50
0
Increase affordable housing
Keep unique look, feel of Town
Medium-sized, reasonably price grocery store
Preserve open space
Emphasize land, water, energy conservation and reduction in waste, air, and water pollution
No more "McMansions"
More bike paths/lanes, walking paths, parks, playgrounds
Continue strong support of school teachers and administrators
Work with Gloucester, GlouBiotec and Endicott College to attract science-based businesses
Take advantage of the creative talent who live in Rockport

[3]The survey did not define "affordable housing" as deed-restricted or lower cost market-rate housing.

Figure 7. In smaller suburbs, TOD essentially means a return to traditional New England village concepts, updated for our times.

Transit-Oriented Development

Achieving the Town's goals requires a multi-pronged, long-term effort. Redevelopment of the station area is one piece of this puzzle. In 2017 the Town engaged MAPC on a planning effort for the station area based upon principles of "transit-oriented development" ("TOD"). TOD is a type of development that typically includes a mixture of housing, office, retail, and other amenities integrated into a walkable neighborhood and located close to quality public transportation.

TOD comes in a variety of scales, from the skyscrapers of Boston to the more fine-grained building typologies found along commuter rail lines. While not every building needs to be mixed-use in order to be considered TOD, the neighborhood as a whole should be mixed use. Pedestrian infrastructure and strong urban design should ensure that the neighborhood is well-connected, safe, and walkable for pedestrians.

MAPC adds a further dimension to TOD, emphasizing the need for "equitable" transit-oriented development. E-TOD ensures that station areas provide housing choices for a range of incomes, thus ensuring that the opportunities and benefits afforded by transit and its associated development are broadly available.

Outside of Boston and its adjacent communities, strong TOD is in essence a return to the traditional New England downtowns of previous generations. Relevant elements include a scale that's appropriate to the community, buildings located along the sidewalk with parking in the rear, ground-floor retail where feasible, pedestrian amenities, and quality architecture.

Demand for TOD is extremely strong in the MAPC region. This is due both to changing demographics, as well as shifting preferences. As noted, the population is aging and the "baby boomer" generation is now starting to retire. Many in this generation are seeking to downsize from their single family homes, increasing the demand for other housing types, which could "free up" single family homes for new families.

In addition, 20-34 year olds, comprise a significant portion of the population (Figure 8). Many members of this cohort are delaying starting a family and/or are having smaller families than previous generations. More importantly, this cohort is generally interested in living in a downtown setting, where they can walk to restaurants and other points of interest, as well as living near transit. For example, according to a recent poll, 76% of this generation want to live in a transit-oriented neighborhood.[4]

Finally, although families with school-age children (i.e., often people between 35-65 years of age) are primarily interested in living in a community with good schools, many would like easy access to the trappings of downtown settings. That is, even if they don't live directly in a TOD area, they want to live close to this environment, where they can access restaurants and other amenities.

[4]2015 Urban Land Institute Boston/New England and MassINC Polling of 660 Boston-area young professionals.

Figure 8. Both younger adults and baby boomers are increasingly living in walkable areas with a mix of uses, located near transit. Although people between those age groups are most concerned with quality of schools and more space, many also want to live close to these types of neighborhoods.

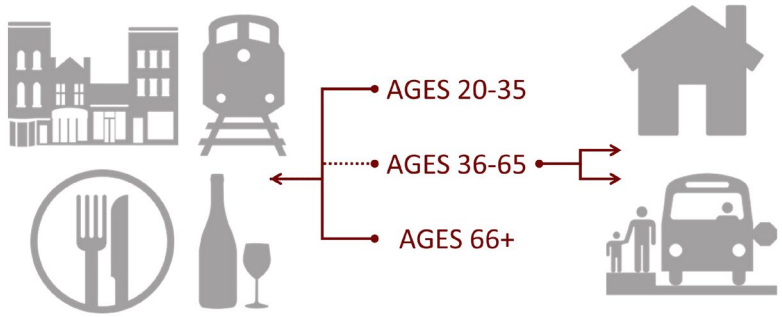
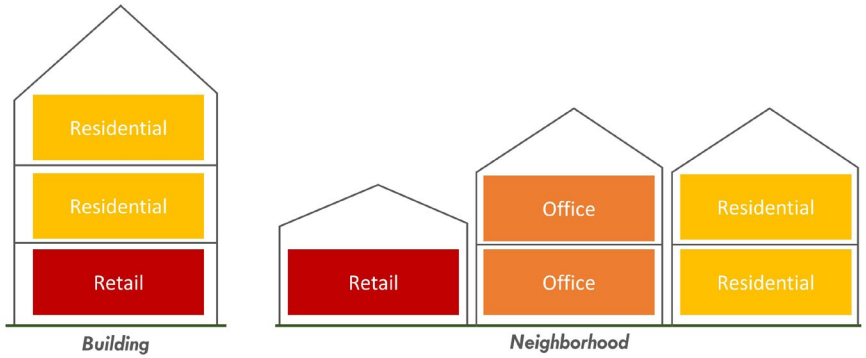


Figure 9. TOD can mean both mixed-use buildings and a mix of various single-use buildings. Good urban design and pedestrian connectivity is critical to ensuring a vibrant neighborhood.



TOD is found throughout the North Shore (Figure 10), underscoring its demand and usefulness at different scales. The cities of Salem and Beverly have been constructing and permitting fairly large developments near their stations and downtowns. But smaller scale projects exist in places such as Gloucester and Manchester-by-the-Sea with plans for TOD even as far as Newburyport.

Figure 10. Examples of transit-oriented development exist throughout the North Shore. These range from smaller scale buildings in Manchester (top left) and Gloucester (top right) that may be appropriate models for Rockport to larger scale buildings found in Salem and Beverly (bottom row).

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THE STUDY AREA

The boundaries for the study area (Figure 11) were developed in consultation with members of the Rockport Planning Board and landowners in the immediate vicinity. It is important to note that not all parcels included in the study area could or should be redeveloped; rather, they are intended to serve to work towards the creation of a cohesive neighborhood.

Figure 11. Diagram of study area with existing conditions.

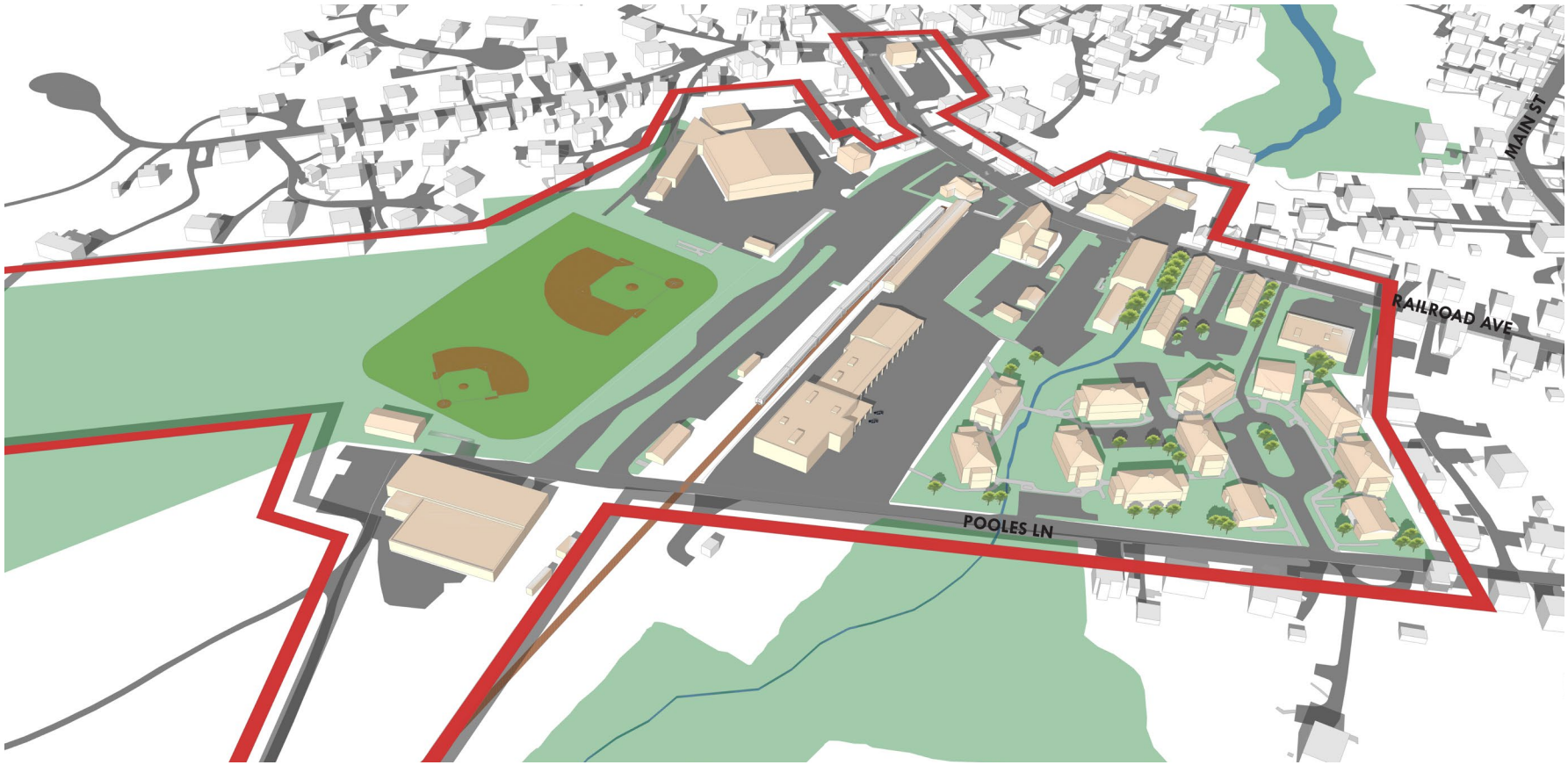
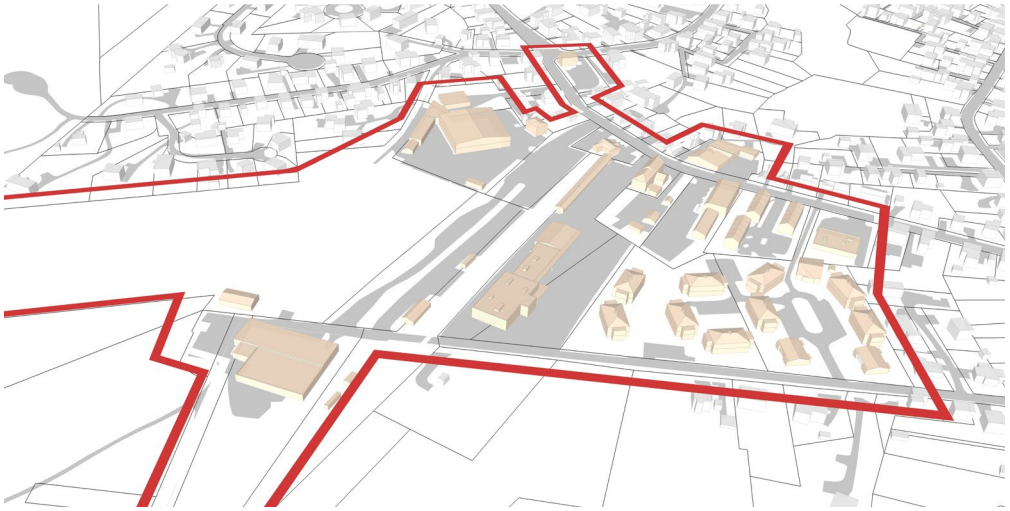
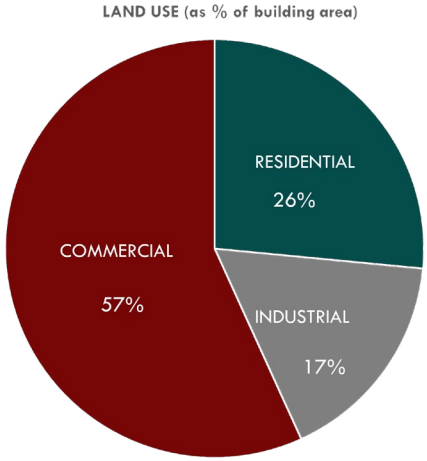


Figure 12. Summary of existing conditions





STUDY AREA

- Total lot area: **28 acres**
- Number of parcels: **19 parcels (not all developable)**
- Total building area: **159,340 square feet**
- Total assessed value: **$13.3 million**
- Average height: **1 story**
- Parking and Driveways: **Approx. 8 acres (28%)**

Zoning and Land Use

The study area contains 19 parcels, covering 28 acres. The total building area is approximately 160,000 square feet and the average building is one story. Parking and driveways comprise 28% of the study area, a figure that is far higher if the parcel containing Evans Field is excluded (Figure 12).

More than half of the building area (57%) is devoted to commercial use. Whistlestop Mall, adjacent to the station, contains a mixture of retail and office space in a large footprint building as well as a smaller "liner" building. On the other side of the station is a large hardware store and lumber yard. Other commercial space in the study area includes a Dunkin Donuts, a Cumberland Farms convenience store, bank, automotive service station, and various other commercial spaces. Seventeen percent is devoted to industrial use, including Treehouse Design, an architecture and construction management firm. The remaining 26% of building space is residential, comprised primarily of a subsidized senior housing complex (operated by the Rockport Housing Authority), as well as a parcel containing approximately 15 townhouses. The study area also contains Evans Field, which has baseballs fields, and a public parking lot, used primarily for station commuters. See Figure 13 for a sample of photographs of the study area.

Figure 13. Existing buildings in the study area.

Although not directly in the study area, an examination of the half mile around the station (Figure 14) can provide a fuller view and understanding of the area. The half mile surrounding area is primarily residential, although also includes part of the downtown district. The half mile walkshed contains almost 1,200 dwelling units, the vast majority of which are single family homes.[5] This equates to an average of six dwelling units per acre, which is low compared to all stations in the MBTA system and a bit lower than stations in similar contexts. On average, residents own 1.4 vehicles per household.

Figure 14. Diagram depicting approximately a half mile from the study area.

[5]A half mile is a standard benchmark that is generally considered "walkable" to a station area (approximately 10 minutes for the average person). for A "walkshed" incorporates the road network to provide a more accurate reflection of distance from the commuter rail station than a circular half-mile boundary.

There are several zoning districts within the study area and half mile distance. The majority of the study area is part of the Semi-Residential District. This district allows a variety of retail and commercial uses, as well as a number of residential types, by right or Special Permit. Various industrial uses are also allowed by Special Permit (Figure 15). Most of the remaining parcels are part of the Residential District, which, as the name suggests, allows primarily residential buildings. The remaining parcels are Town or MBTA-owned (Evans Field and parking lots).

The surrounding area is almost entirely part of the Residential District (Figure 16). Parts of the downtown district are also within a half-mile from the station, which allows for a variety of uses and is the only district that explicitly allows mixed-use development.

Dimensional standards for the various districts, provided in Table 1, follow a pattern similar to many other suburban locations. Heights are restricted town-wide, although may be higher through Special Permit.

Parking requirements apply town-wide, based upon use. Townhouses and multi-family buildings are set at 1.5 spaces per unit, which is generally keeping in line with better practices in similar contexts. Requirements for retail and commercial vary by use, but in general are higher than best practice. Members of the Planning Board, however, have indicated that they often provide relief on the parking requirements.

Figure 15. Existing land use

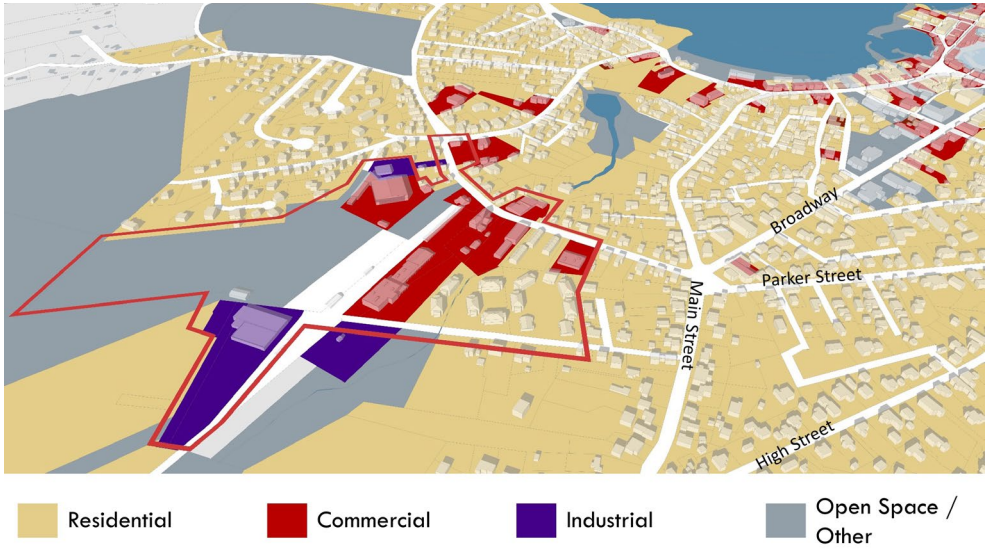


Figure 16. Existing zoning districts

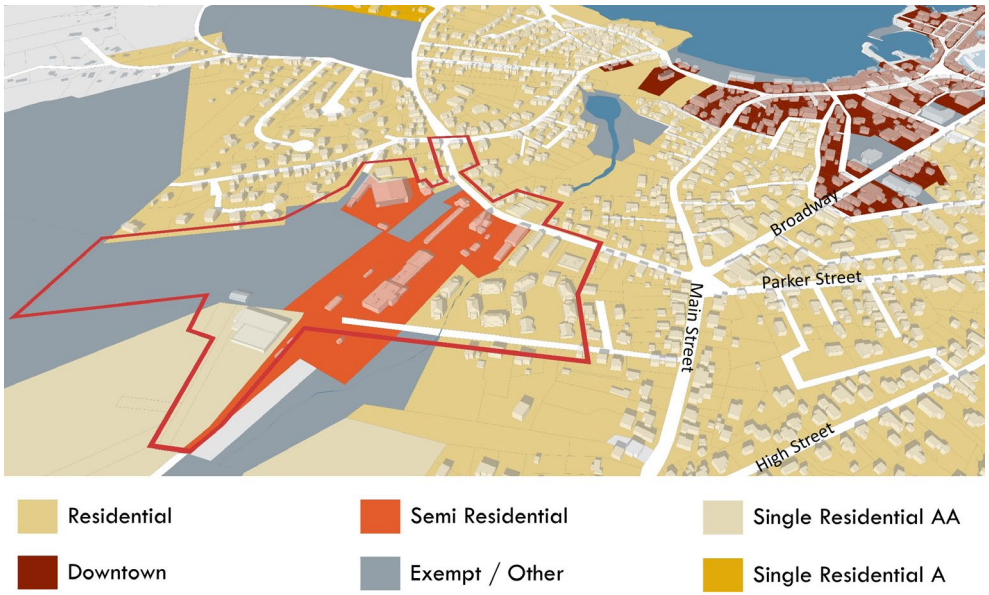


Table 1: Summary of Dimensional Regulations

Zone:	Single Res. AA (SRAA)	Single Res. (SR)	Res. A (RA)	Res. (R)	Semi-Res. (SMR)	General (G)	Down-town (D)
Minimum Lot Dimensions							
Area sq' single family	40,000	20,000	12,000	10,000	10,000	7,500	5,000
Area sq' two family	40,000	20,000	20,000	15,000	15,000	7,500	7,500
Area sq' other uses	40,000	20,000	20,000	15,000	15,000	7,500	7,500
Frontage on street or way	150	75	75	50	50	50	30
Minimum Required Yard Dimensions / Setbacks							
Front Yard	20	20	20	20	20	15	10
Side Yard	15	15	15	10	10	10	10
Rear Yard	15	15	15	10	10	10	10
Maximum Building Height							
Stories	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5
Feet	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Coverage							
Building Coverage % of Sq'	10%	15%	20%	25%	25%	50%	50%
Accessory Buildings or Structures							
Min. Bldg. Separation	15	15	15	15	15	10	10
Side/rear setbacks	10	10	10	10	10	10	10v

Zoning Conclusions

Zoning should act as a mechanism that provides landowners and the community with a predictable approach for future redevelopment. It also can act as a "signal" for a community's vision. Existing zoning in the study area may hinder strong transit-oriented development. Examples of deficiencies include:

- Districts in the study area do not allow mixed-use development, and nowhere in the zoning by-law are there provisions for development of structures more than four residential units.
- The number of retail units in a building is capped at what may be arbitrary amounts. (For example, Section IV.A.8.a states that the maximum number of retail units on any floor of any building shall be four.)
- Parking requirements for retail and other commercial uses are greater than best practice for transit-oriented areas.
- Heights are lower than is often a best practice for transit-oriented areas. While the by-law makes provision for taller buildings through Special Permit, there is a lack of clarity on what considerations drive such an approval.
- Setbacks, especially for front yards (20 feet minimum) are greater than what would be expected for a walkable, village-like area.

Transportation network

The study area contains two roadways: Railroad Avenue and Pooles Lane. Railroad Avenue, Route 127, is the primary roadway that connects to Main Street, Broadway, and points north. Parts of the roadway, including the study area, were recently reconstructed. The project included repaving, new sidewalks and ADA-required accessibility improvements (Figure 17).

The sidewalk improvements help improve walkability and pedestrian safety; however, along the study area there are numerous and wide curb cuts that hinder the pedestrian experience. The winding roadway is also too narrow for bicycle facilities (e.g., bike lanes) that would improve safety for cyclists.

Pooles Lane currently lacks sidewalks and is in poor condition along parts of the roadway (Figure 18). This street provides a "back entrance" to Whistlestop Mall, as well as access to Evans Field, several local businesses, and the senior housing complex. Especially if/ when new development takes place in the study area, there are opportunities to make numerous multi-modal improvements to Pooles Lane.

Figure 17. Example cross-section of Railroad Ave

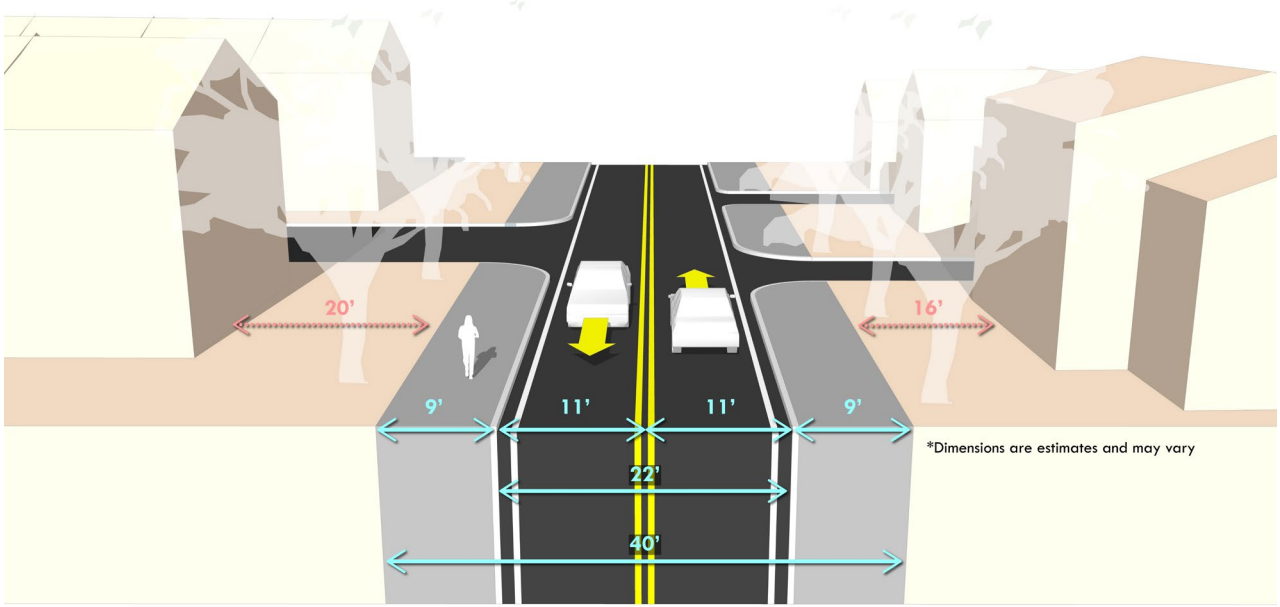
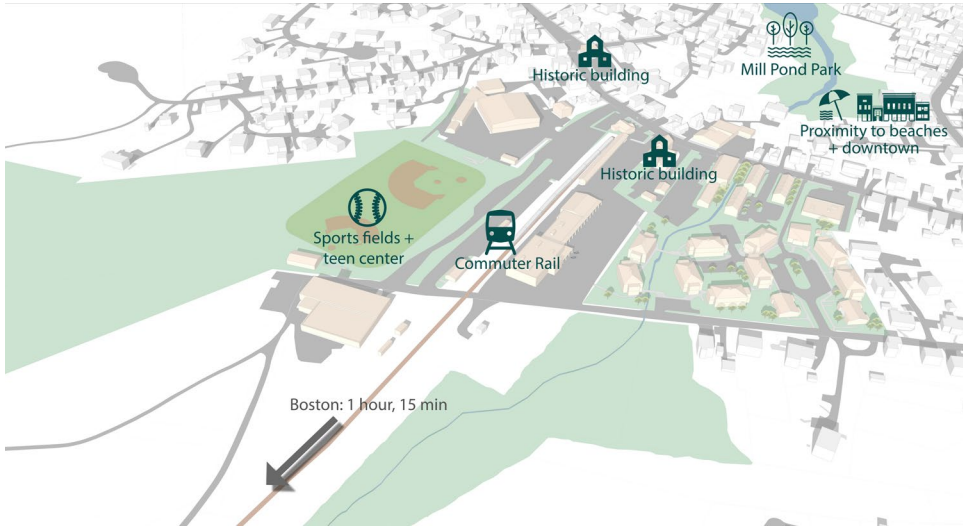


Figure 18. Pooles Lane existing conditions

Area Assessment

The study area has a number of existing assets that can provide the foundation for future redevelopment (Figure 19). First and foremost is the commuter rail that provides the locus for transit-oriented development. See Enhancing Options for Commuters Section for additional details on the commuter rail. Evans field contains both sports fields and an adjacent teen center. Although many of the buildings are developed in an outdated, auto-centric style, there are a couple historic properties that add charm and a sense of place to the area. Finally, one of the study area's key strengths is its location relative to other parts of Rockport. The beaches and the existing downtown are less than a mile away and tranquil Millbrook Meadow is even closer. In addition, because it has water and sewer capacity, the Town avoids a constraint found in many other small towns.

Figure 19. The study area's strengths include the station, Evans Field, and proximity to other points of interest.



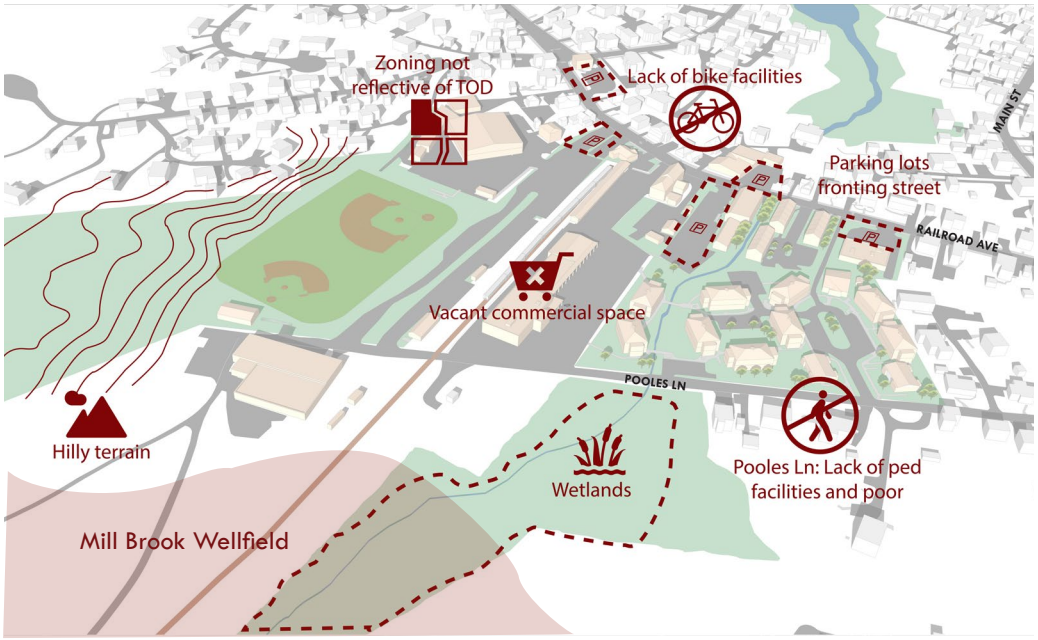
The study area also has its share of challenges (Figure 20). As noted above, the existing zoning does not reflect best practices to create the setting for village-like transit-oriented development, and indeed, there are few existing buildings in the study area that could act as a precedent for future development.

In addition, successful transit-oriented development relies on pedestrian activity. Many parking lots front onto Railroad Avenue, which reduce pedestrian comfort. Pooles Lane lacks sidewalks. The lack of bicycle infrastructure, such as bicycle lanes, hinders the connection from the area to other parts of Town, especially important as bicycling use has greatly increased throughout the region over the recent years.

Whistlestop Mall has vacant commercial space, calling into question the type and amount of non-residential development that could be supported in the area.

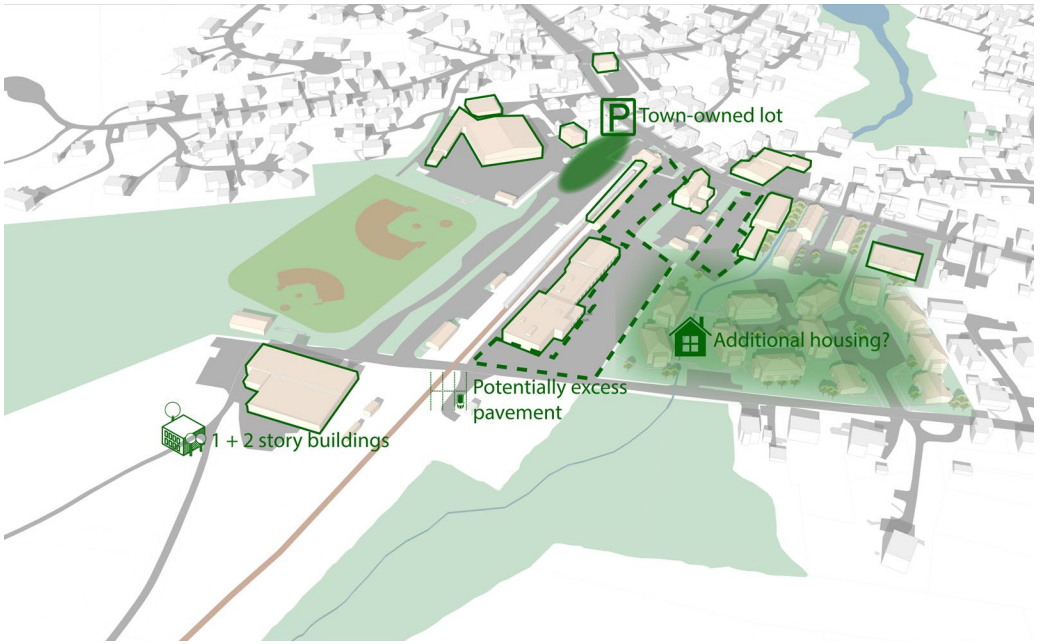
Finally, topographic and environmental conditions, i.e., hilly terrain and nearby wetlands, can make development in some parts of the study area difficult or infeasible.

Figure 20. The study area also has a number of challenges that can impede the development of a walkable neighborhood.



There are several opportunities that could build upon the area's strengths while addressing its challenges. Most buildings are single story, suggesting an opportunity for redevelopment of underutilized parcels. With better parking requirements, the existing space used for parking could potentially allow for more development than would otherwise be available. The public lots also present an opportunity, either for redevelopment or, more likely, an opportunity to allow private development to further reduce its parking requirements. Finally, the senior housing complex could potentially allow additional development on its land by redevelopment or replacement of existing structures (Figure 21).

Figure 21. While challenges exist, there are opportunities to build upon the area's strengths to achieve the Town's goals. For example, the Town-owned lot can form the basis for a shared parking mechanism and existing businesses could be rehoused in mixed-use buildings.



PROCESS + COMMUNITY INPUT

The station area plan utilized an iterative, collaborative approach to achieve the Town's goals, fit the Town's character, and be economically feasible. To develop this plan, MAPC considered the following:

- Incorporating the Town's vision
- Site conditions
- Engagement with key stakeholders
- Public input

While it is ultimately the land owners' decision on whether to redevelop their properties, the public process and community input help create the regulatory conditions to allow for redevelopment to take place in a way that comports with the Town's vision.

A kick-off meeting took place in November 2017 with key landowners, town staff, and planning board members. The meeting's focus was introducing the concept of transit-oriented development, benefits of this type of development, and initial thoughts on the site. A critical outcome from this meeting was interest from landowners in continuing the study and proceeding with development of the plan.

This meeting was followed by a public forum in February 2018. Although the meeting was not heavily attended, four out of five members of the Planning Board were present, as well as members of the public.

Building Heights

The input session contained two primary elements. First, was input related to building heights. The Town's zoning by-laws limit building heights to 2.5 stories or 30 feet. This exercise was intended to test whether the community felt comfortable allowing for slightly greater heights in the study area. While this could maximize the area's development potential and is typical for an area around a station, this consideration should be balanced by the Town's desire to maintain its historic character.

Participants were shown a range of building heights through simple diagrams.[6] The diagrams had similar, simple architecture and were drawn from the same location. This provided two benefits:

1. Participants could focus on the building height, as opposed to extraneous aspects such as architecture and public realm elements that could bias the input.
2. Participants were able to make judgments of the buildings from the same ground-level position, i.e., directly across the street at Railroad Avenue.

Participants were asked to mark whether they considered each building height appropriate or inappropriate for the station area. They were first shown a single story retail building, followed by 1.5, two, and three-story buildings (Figure 22). A

[6]Fourteen people took part in the community feedback exercises.

majority of participants felt that one story buildings were inappropriate in the station area and a slight majority felt that 1.5 stories were appropriate. Strong majorities felt that two and three-story buildings were appropriate.

When shown a four story building, a strong majority felt that it was inappropriate, i.e., too tall. Participants were then shown three additional options to gauge whether there would be any change in sentiment. The first was to require a setback between the building and street. This could reduce the feeling of building mass and create space for outdoor seating. A majority still felt that a 4-story building was inappropriate, although a less strong one than a four-story building with no setback.

Participants then rated a building that rose two stories, stepped back significantly, and then rose to four stories. The intended effect of this step-back is to reduce the building's bulk, while allowing for a larger building than would be otherwise allowed. While a slight majority rated this as inappropriate, the rating was almost equal with those who now found this style appropriate.

Finally, participants were shown a four-story building on the interior of a lot, set behind a 2.5 story building. When seen from the street, the four-story building was effectively hidden from view by the smaller building along the frontage. A strong majority of participants felt this was appropriate for the study area. Allowing a taller building that was shielded by a smaller building along the frontage provided an effective means to maintain community character while maximizing development potential on the parcel.

Figure 22. Participants at the community forum indicated whether they thought buildings of various heights were appropriate or inappropriate for the station area.

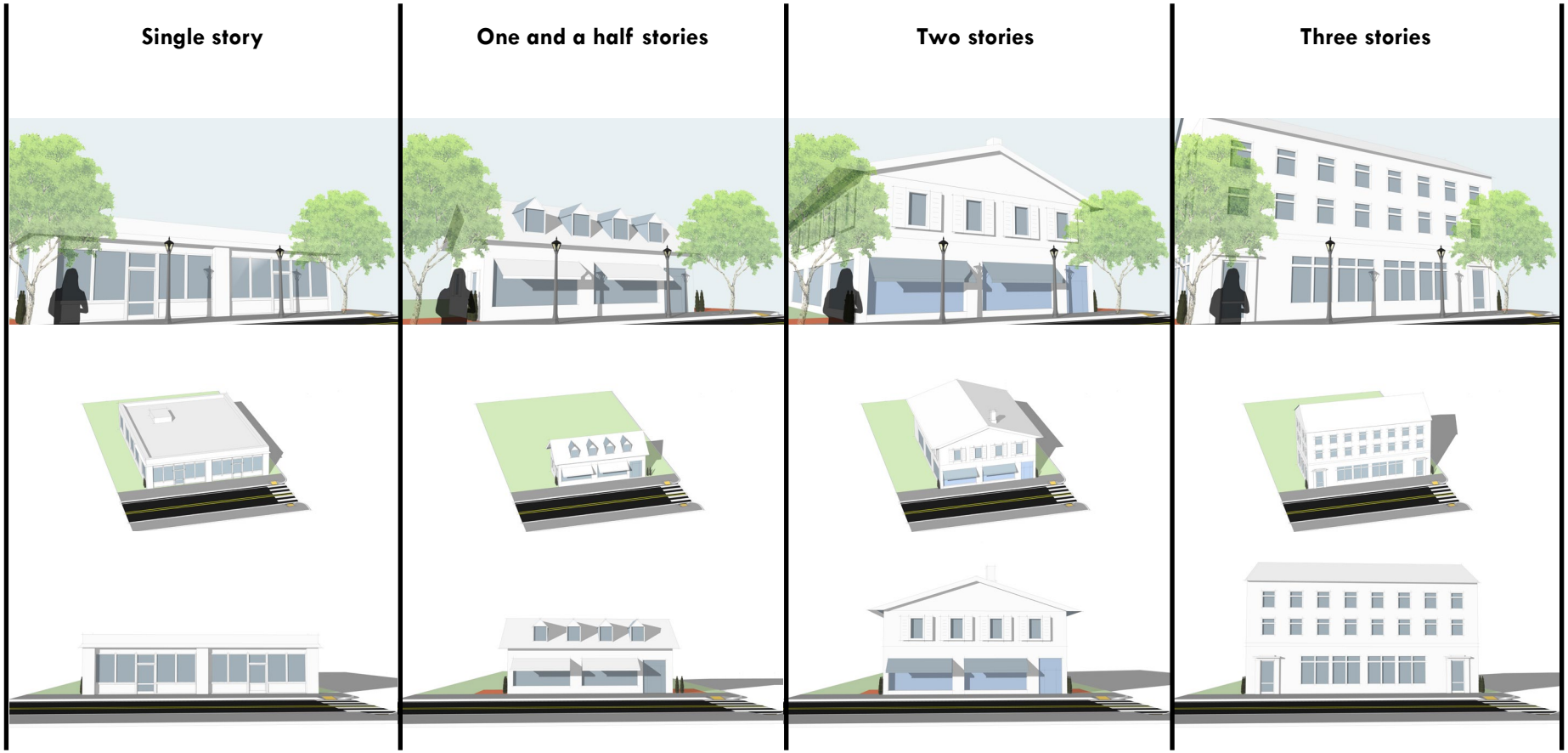
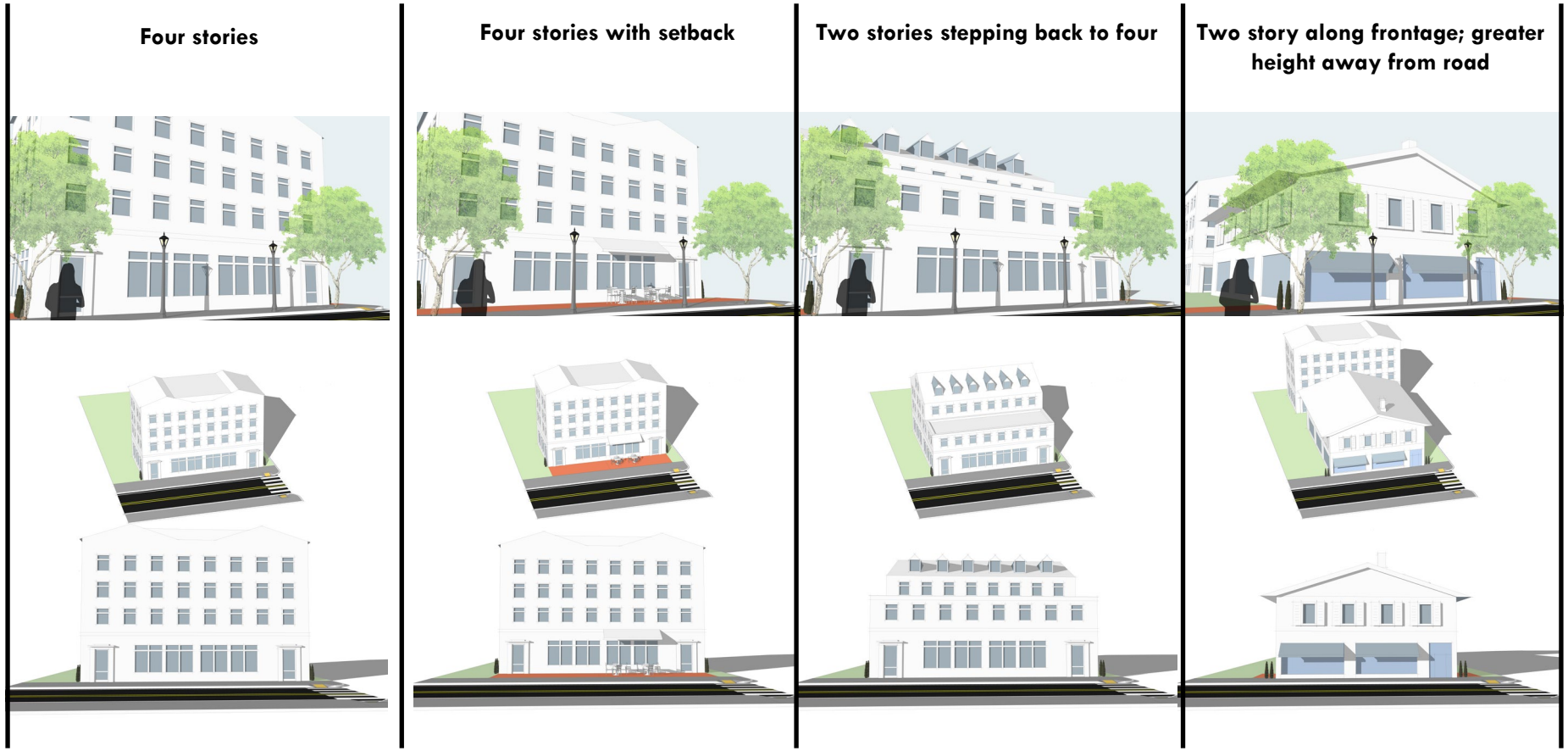


Figure 22 continued.

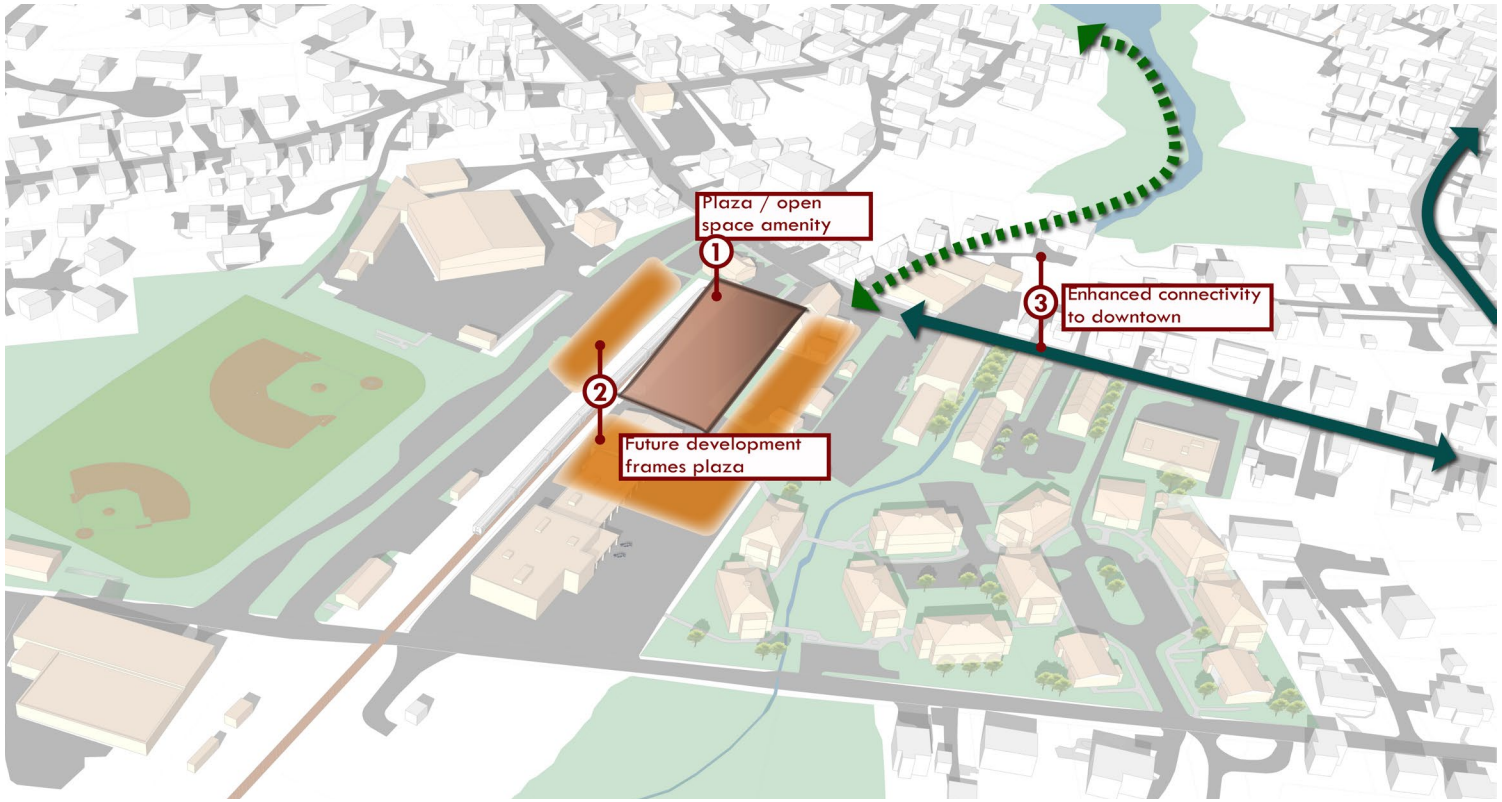

Four stories
Four stories with setback
Two stories stepping back to four
Two story along frontage; greater height away from road

Station Area Concepts

Participants also provided extensive input on a number of "concepts" and elements that could be included in the plan.[7] Each of the four concepts had a different overall focus, key characteristic, land use and urban design components, and transportation patterns and improvements.

The first concept was called the Gateway Node (Figure 23). The overall focus of this concept was to provide a cluster that complements the existing downtown and helps create a connection between the two areas. A key characteristic of this concept was the creation of a plaza or other open space amenity, which would act as a welcoming "gateway" for both visitors and residents arriving by train. Future mixed-use development would be organized to frame this space. An emphasis would be on pedestrian connections to downtown, including the potential for a shared use path along Mill Brook Creek.

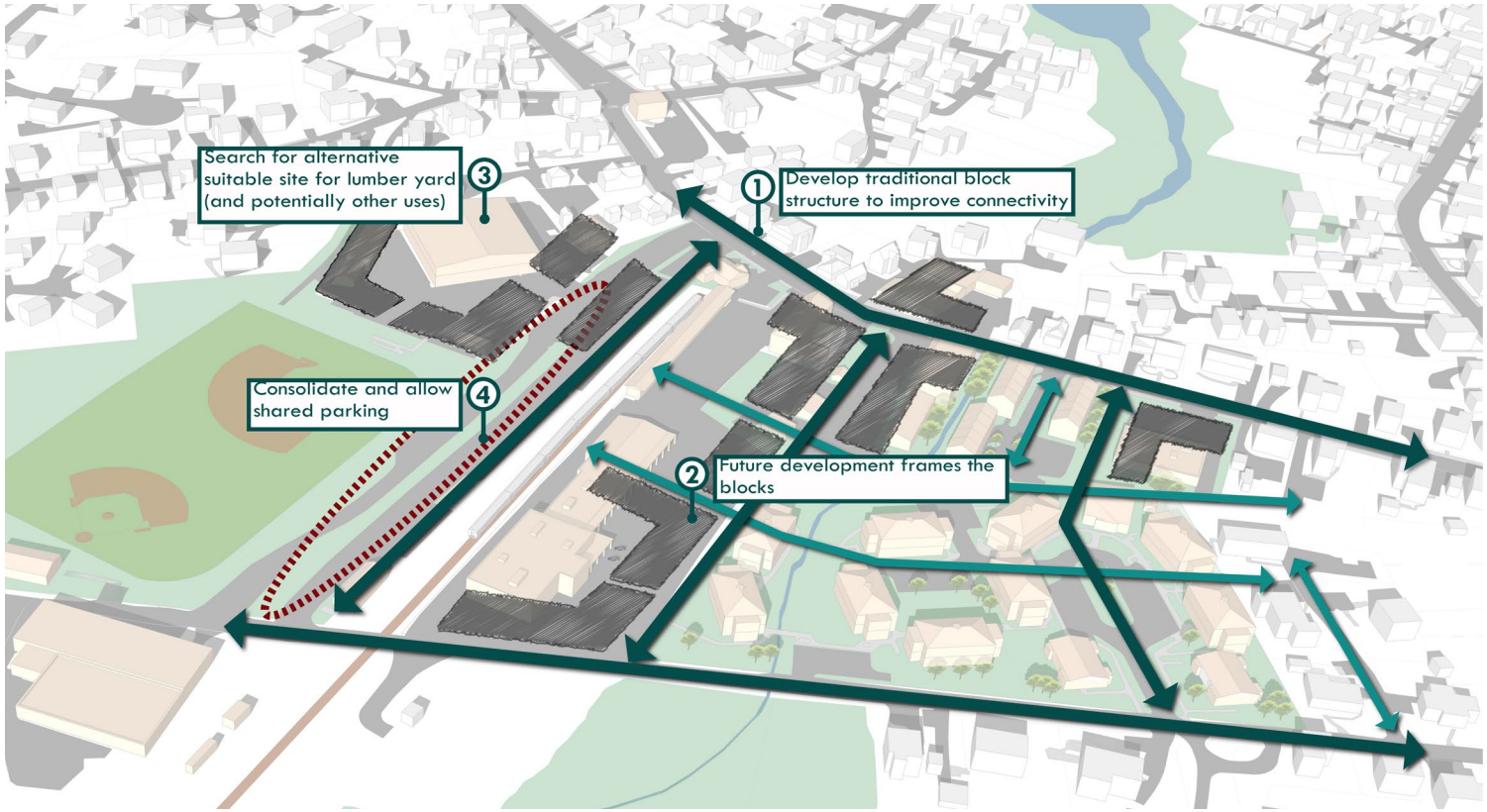
Figure 23. Diagram summarizing the Gateway Node.



[7]Note that because of the small sample size the results are not statistically significant. They do, however, provide insight from a segment of the community and provided direction for the future planning efforts.

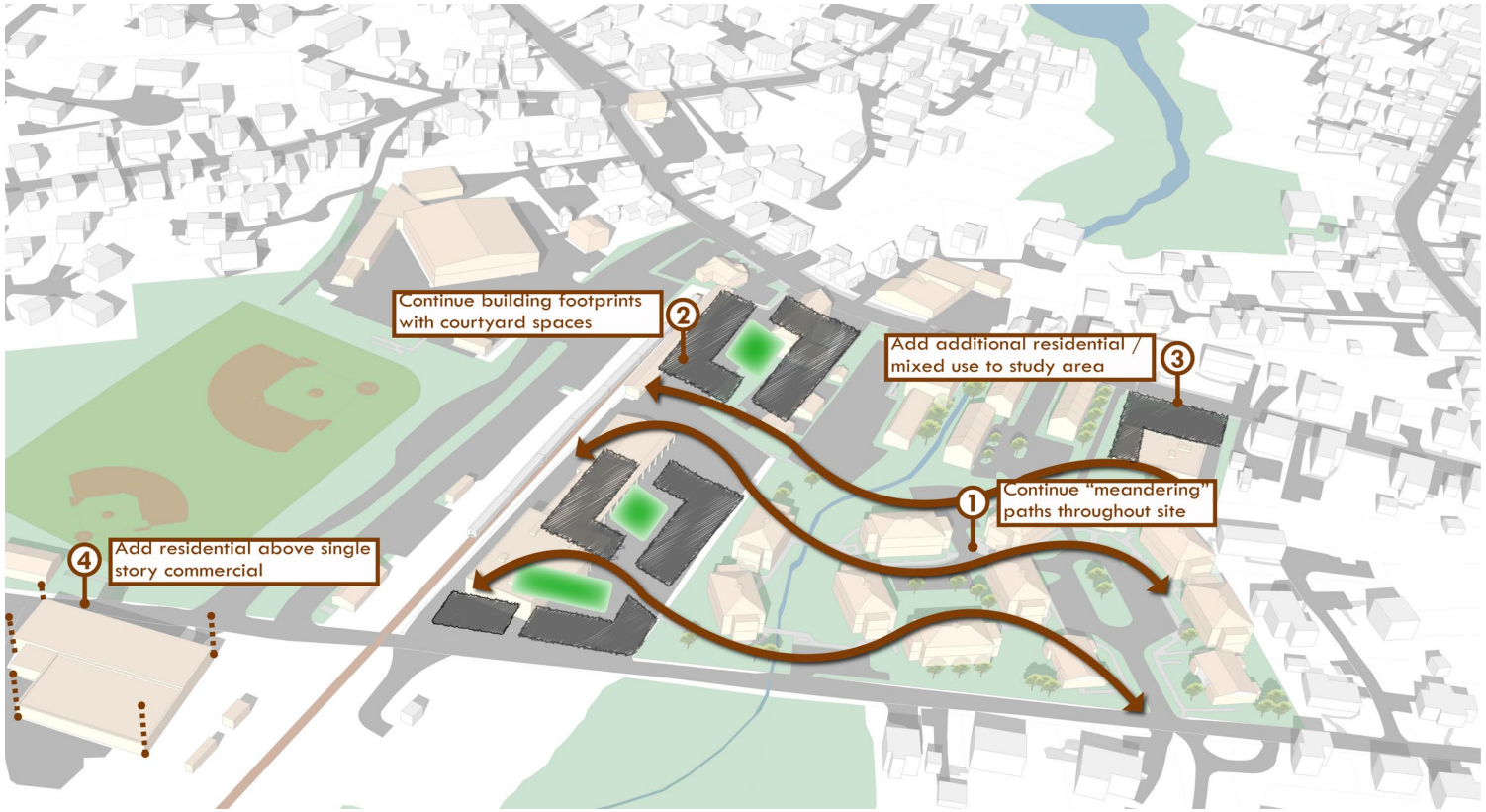
The second concept was the Independent Node (Figure 24). This focused on creating a new neighborhood in the Town with a distinct sense of place. Additional emphasis would be on enhancing walkability and establishing a degree of a gridded network, reducing block size and better connecting Railroad Avenue to Pooles Lane. Development would frame the circulation network, thus incorporating elements from traditional New England style villages. Because this concept seeks to maximize development potential, a "shared parking" mechanism is suggested to reduce the amount of space devoted to automobiles. Finally, the concept suggests searching for alternative locations for some existing businesses to allow for new types of development.

Figure 24. Diagram summarizing the Independent Node.


Search for alternative suitable site for lumber yard (and potentially other uses)
3
1
Develop traditional block structure to improve connectivity
Consolidate and allow shared parking
4
2
Future development frames the blocks

The third concept was the Commuter Node (Figure 25). In contrast with the previous two concepts, this focused primarily on residential development. Rather than a vibrant, village-like neighborhood, this concept sought to create a tranquil area that maximizes the number of residences near the station. Meandering footpaths in the adjacent senior housing complex would be carried into other parts of the neighborhood. Similarly, housing would be framed around courtyard-style open spaces.

Figure 25. Diagram summarizing the Commuter Node.



The final concept was the Local Needs Node (Figure 26). This focused on providing more everyday goods for the local community. New development would be minimal, although there could be adaptive reuse of existing buildings, as well as some infill development. Transportation improvements would focus on improving site access for vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists, especially along Pooles Lane. This concept provided the least amount of change from existing conditions.

Figure 26. Diagram summarizing the Local Needs Node.

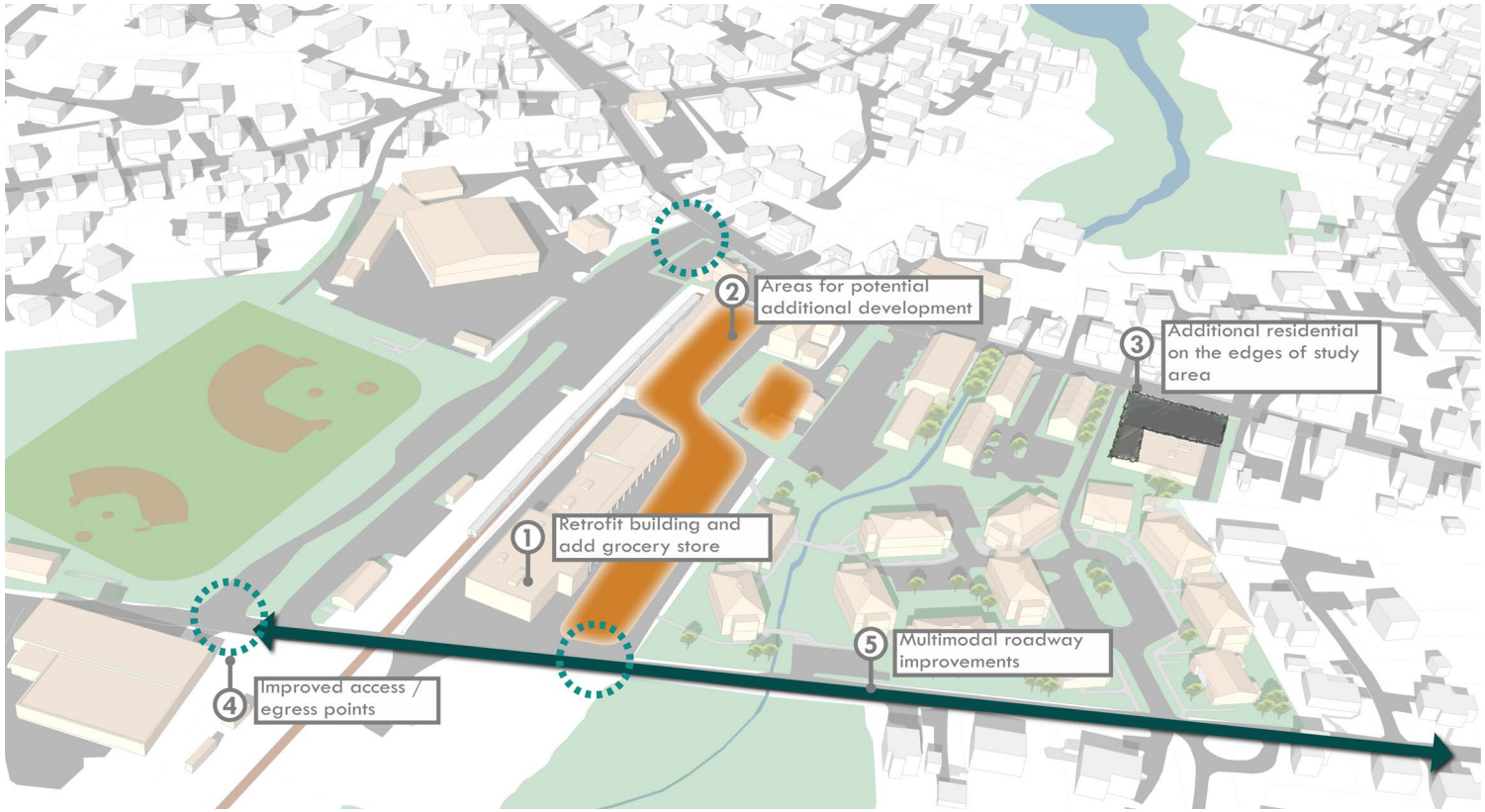


Figure 27. Accompanying the concept diagrams were photos to give participants inspiration and ideas for how various concepts could look, including plazas, footpaths, and mixed-use buildings.

Downtown Pompano Beach (Source: MetroAtlantic)

Midland Railway Square © Dion Robeson

Key Takeaways

Participants noted their favorite and least favorite overall concept, focus, key characteristic, and circulation component (Figure 28). They also rated whether they liked various elements within each concept (e.g., the plaza in the Gateway Node or meandering paths in the Commuter Node.)

For the "overall concept", participants were almost perfectly split among which was their favorite with the Gateway Node as the top choice. The Independent Node's "focus" on creating a new neighborhood was the top choice among that category.

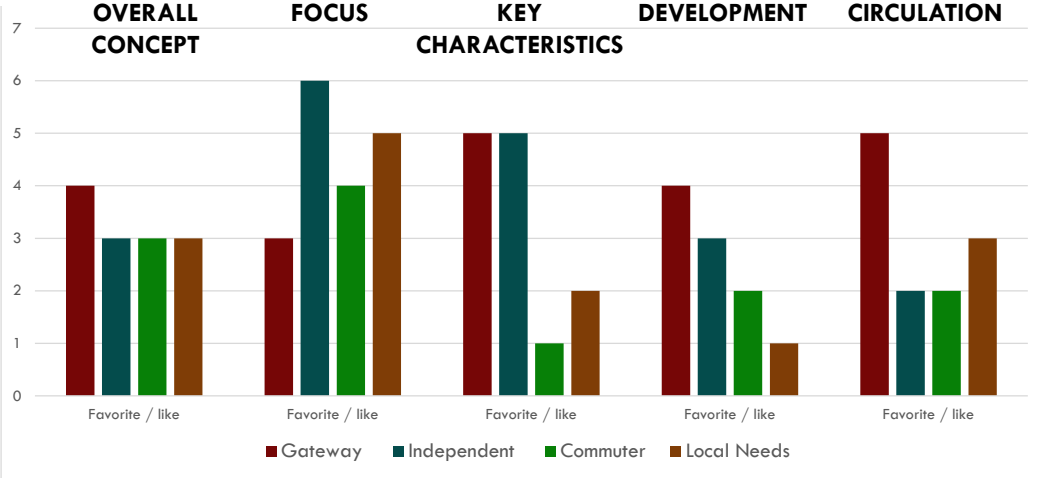
For "key characteristic," the plaza and a walkable area were tied for top choice (Gateway and Independent, respectively). The Commuter Node's key characteristic as a tranquil, residential neighborhood, was the least favorite from this category.

For "development," again the Gateway Node's concept of framing development around the plaza and the Independent Node's concept of mixed-use development in a walkable setting were the top choices.

For "circulation" the top choice was the Gateway Node's focus on external connections to downtown and other points of interest.

When asked about the various elements within each node, participants generally liked the various proposals far more than they disliked them. This may suggest that, generally speaking, participants were interested in seeing change of some sort in this area and were open to various options.

Figure 28. Summary of top choices from concept plan exercise.



Rockport Station Area Transit-Oriented Village Plan

APPLYING THE VISION: ILLUSTRATIVE PLAN

Based upon a public forum and multiple meetings with landowners, this illustrative plan incorporates a number of the community's priorities and interests. The community prioritized the creation of a vibrant, walkable, mixed-use neighborhood that would complement the existing downtown. This is achieved through a variety of strategies discussed in this section. To emphasize the scale envisioned by the Town, this plan often refers to the future development as a "transit-oriented village."

Note that the illustrative plan provides only one possible outcome that could result from district improvements and rezoning strategies, discussed in the following sections of this report. Implementation of the recommendations provides flexibility for how future development could take place, including the land use program, site plan, and amount of development that occurs (Figure 29). This will allow land owners to respond to market demand and financial feasibility, while developing within the context of the community's vision.

A detailed market demand analysis for residential and commercial uses was not completed as part of this plan. Nonetheless, regional trends suggest the following:

- Housing throughout the region is in high demand, especially multi-family housing
- Retail potential tends to be limited, an issue exacerbated by online retailers. Vacancies of retail spaces in the area underscore this limited potential. The study area is unlikely to become a major "destination" for visitors from afar, although the right mix of retailers could potentially be supported by tourists arriving by train and new residents resulting from redevelopment in the study area.
- Given its location (outside the core of Boston and its environs and without major highway access), the study area is unlikely to support major office development. More likely are several small offices (e.g., medical office, architectural firm, accountancy, short-term "flexible space" office rentals) catering to the local residents.

The illustrative plan (Figure 30) has assumed the above in shaping the proposed development.

This plan also provides a "test" case for providing a realistic scenario of future development based on site constraints, parking requirements, etc.

Figure 29. Existing conditions

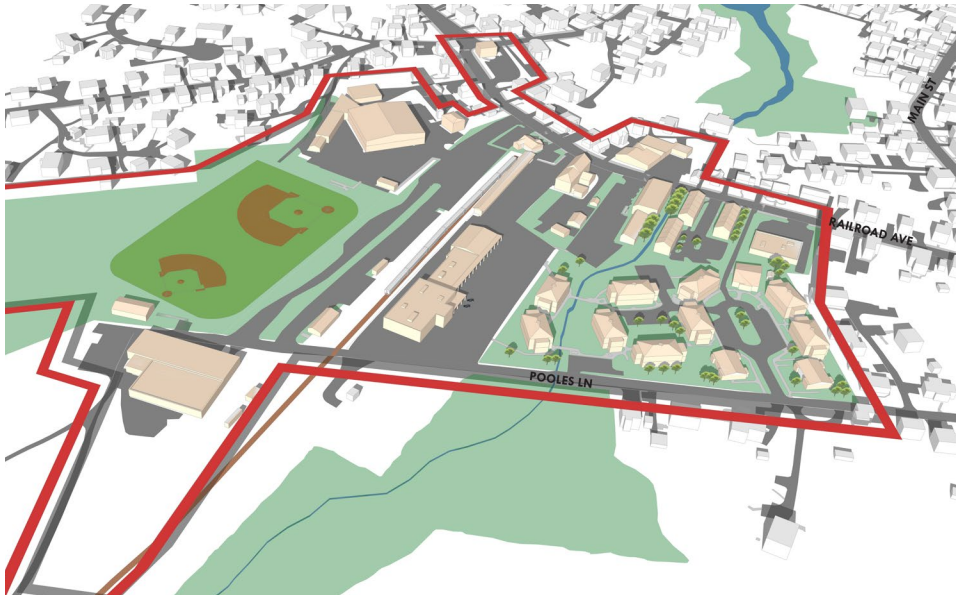


Figure 30. Illustrative plan depicts a possible redevelopment, focusing on several key parcels.

Overarching Principles

GENERAL

Increase in housing

According to its recent visioning process the Town's top priority is the need for more housing, affordable to a broader demographic. Increasing the number of residences also creates a virtuous cycle that feeds into the creation of a vibrant neighborhood and helps support local businesses. The illustrative plan provides a variety of housing options, including deed-restricted affordable units, developed in a way that supports walkability and the creation of an integrated neighborhood.

Meeting local needs

The illustrative plan provides adequate retail and office space to meet local needs and retains existing uses that are an asset to the community, until (and if) those needs can be met in another suitable location.

OPEN SPACE

Plaza

Distinctive, well-designed open space can help create a sense of place and provide an area for the community to gather. The illustrative plan includes a plaza framed by shops that would act as both an amenity for the community, as well as a means to positively impact economic development. The plan also includes other locations for outdoor restaurant/cafe seating.

BUILDINGS

Maintaining community character

The second priority cited through the visioning process was maintaining Rockport's character. The illustrative plan helps to achieve this goal through maintaining traditional scale and architecture along the station area's streets.

Larger buildings hidden from street frontage

At the public forum, the vast majority of the attendees supported slightly larger buildings in the station area, provided they were away from the streets and behind buildings of a more typical height found in Rockport. This allows the community to maintain its character while meeting the priority of increasing housing supply and allowing for future development to be financially feasible.

Adaptive reuse

The illustrative plan incorporates the community's interest in preserving interesting and historic buildings, such as 17 Railroad Avenue (the former hardware/lumber store), while "breathing new life" into these buildings by incorporating new uses and outdoor seating.

Active street fronts

Buildings adjacent to the sidewalk create a walkable, traditional feel. Active uses along the ground floor with minimal setbacks, help create desired vibrancy along the streets.

CONNECTIVITY + PARKING

Connectivity

The illustrative plan focuses on creating additional connections, especially for pedestrians, to create a more fine-grained, walkable environment.

Street improvements

Improvements include improved access to sites, as well as a safer and more comfortable pedestrian environment along Pooles Lane.

Right-sized parking regulations

Adequate parking is critical for an area's success. At the same time, overly burdensome parking requirements can hinder an area from reaching its full potential. Walkable areas adjacent to transit are often appropriate locations for parking requirements different from other parts of a community. In addition, various "shared-parking" mechanisms can help achieve the right balance between parking needs and development potential. The illustrative plan incorporates both modified parking requirements and a shared parking arrangement, which was supported by most attendees at the public forum.

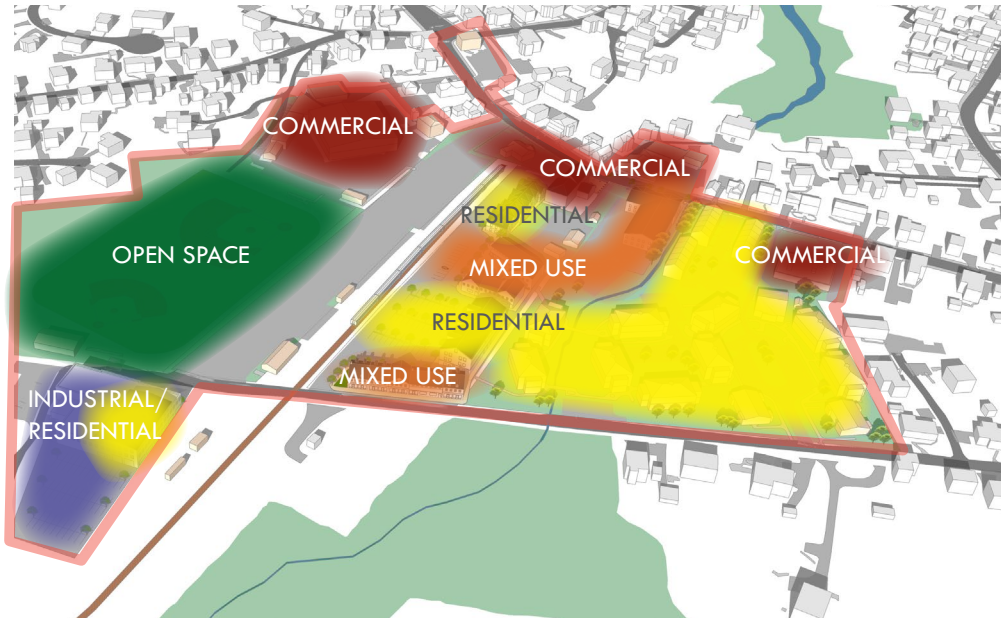
Phase 1

This illustrative plan focuses on several properties around the station, based upon potential interest by the land owners. In addition, phasing development allows time for market absorption. As noted above, this illustrative plan provides a "test" for future zoning changes that can apply to a wider range of properties and is not an actual development proposal.

The properties include: Whistlestop Mall, 17 Railroad Avenue (adaptive reuse of historic structure), 13 Railroad Avenue ("Isinglass" property), and 31 Pooles Lane (Treehouse Design property).

Within large parcels such as Whistlestop Mall, redevelopment can be phased to take into account existing leases.

Figure 31. Illustrative plan land use.



Future Opportunities

There are a number of opportunities for additional development in the study area. For simplicity, these are assumed to be redeveloped in the medium term, if at all, although they could be redeveloped earlier if landowners choose.

Many of these properties operate viable businesses, albeit ones that are by nature auto-centric and thus do not benefit from their location near the station. Thus, finding suitable locations within the Town for these businesses could free these parcels for TOD-style development (Figure 32). The Town has begun discussions on whether Town-owned land could accommodate these businesses. See Implementation for additional details.

Other parcels, containing single-story, single use buildings, may be underutilized. These buildings may have the opportunity to be redeveloped in a way that may or may not retain the existing businesses, while increasing the overall development.

Finally, as noted previously, the senior housing complex could potentially be redeveloped to include more housing, which would help support businesses in the station area. One potential way to redevelop publicly-subsidized housing is to integrate market-rate housing into the development. This type of redevelopment may be challenging but would provide an opportunity to better integrate the development with the neighborhood. Engaging the Rockport Housing Authority to understand potential interest and feasibility of additional development is a first step that may occur in the medium term.

Figure 32. Locations and potential strategies for future development in the study area.

Ⓐ

Potential strategy: relocation of existing uses to other suitable location within Town

Ⓑ

Potential strategy: redevelopment, residential or mix of uses, with appropriate scale and urban design

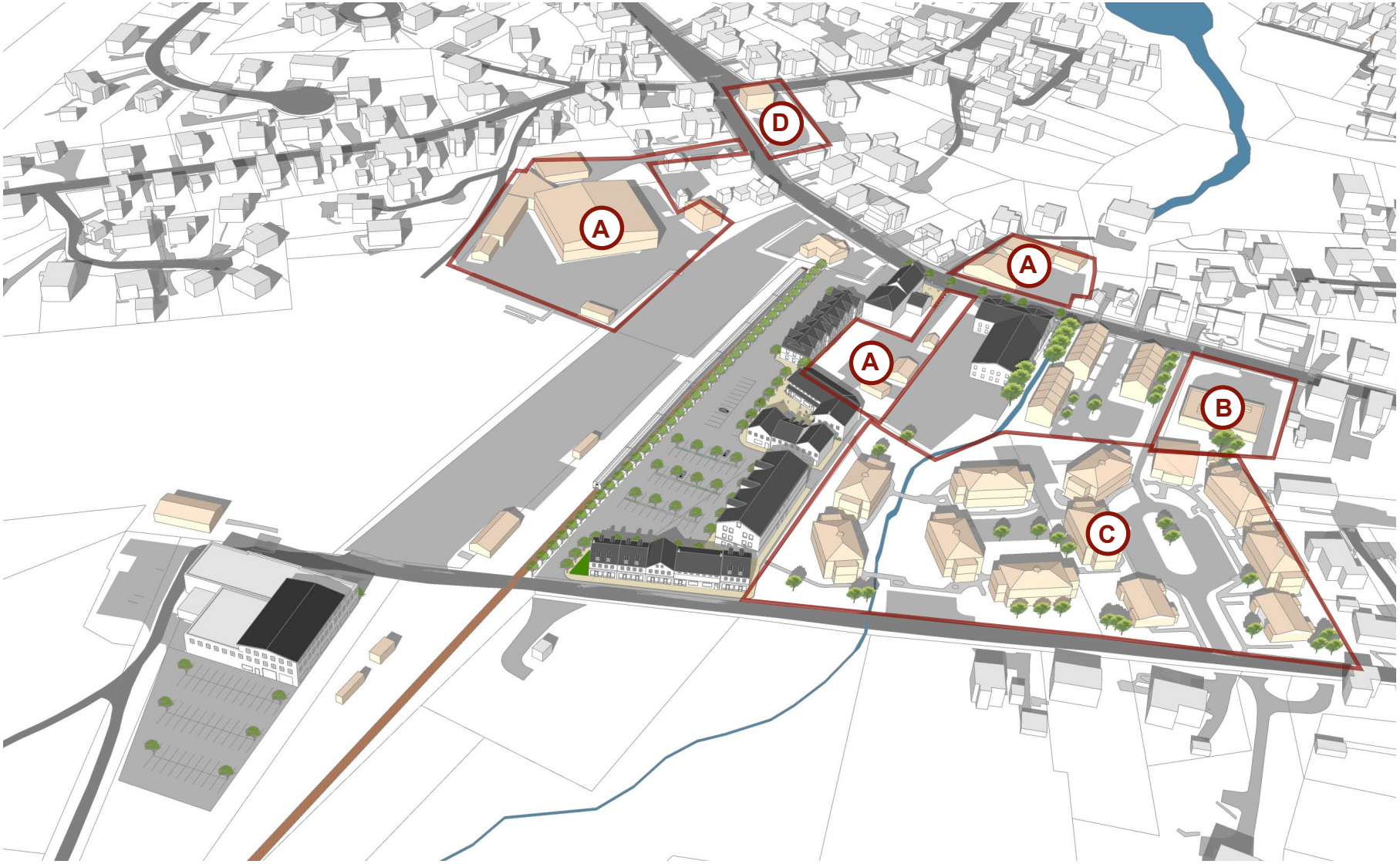
Ⓒ

Potential strategy: additional affordable housing to increase number of residential units adjacent to transit and proximate to downtown

Ⓓ

Potential strategy: preservation and adaptive reuse of distinctive and historic buildings

Figure 32 continued.



Diversity of Housing Options

People make neighborhoods. The best way to make a successful transit-oriented village is to increase the number of people living in the area and adjacent areas. Furthermore, increasing the amount of affordable housing was the top priority according to the Town's visioning process. The plan seeks to provide a variety of housing options that help address the Town's housing goals (Figure 33).

A Mixed-Use

The TOD area focuses on mixed-use development, typically residential above commercial use. Community feedback indicated a desire for a vibrant, walkable neighborhood, which mixed-use development can help achieve. Mixed-use and multi-family buildings are often most attractive to young adults and empty-nesters, as well as those with young children.

B Multi-family

Multi-family buildings maximize a site's number of residential units. The top priority from Rockport's recent visioning survey cited the need to increase the amount of affordable housing. Multi-family residential buildings can contribute to this goal by increasing the housing supply. They can further contribute to the area's vibrancy by having additional people patronizing the local stores, walking along the sidewalks, advocating for community improvements.

C Townhouses

Townhouses provide many of the benefits of single family homes with the density appropriate for a walkable, vibrant station area. In many cases they have more living space than what is often found in a mixed-use or multi-family building. At the same time they're often smaller than a detached single-family home and priced accordingly. Townhouses are often especially attractive to families interested in living in a walkable, mixed-use neighborhood who also want additional space and other conveniences associated with living in traditional single family homes.

D Detached single family

The station area is surrounded by single family homes, providing an option for those wishing to live in more space and have a private yard but still remain within walkable distance to the future TOD development. Efforts should be made to retain and expand the supply of modestly-scaled single family homes on small lots to provide more opportunities for "starter homes" and homes affordable to a broader demographic. The second phase of work following this station area plan will focus on zoning changes to facilitate additional, modestly-sized single family homes.

Figure 33. Potential locations for various housing typologies in the study area.

Circulation

A successful transit-oriented village also hinges on the ability of people to walk around (Figure 34). Safety is critical: sidewalks, crosswalks, and other types of pedestrian infrastructure provide the basis for walking. But walkability extends beyond safety: walking should be comfortable, intuitive, and easy. The following elements, combined with neighborhood improvements such as bringing buildings close to the sidewalk, can help improve the area's walkability.

A Multi-modal improvements to Pooles Lane, including sidewalks and crosswalks, to improve safety and comfort to accommodate existing and future development

B Vehicular traffic focused away from future development and, therefore, pedestrians

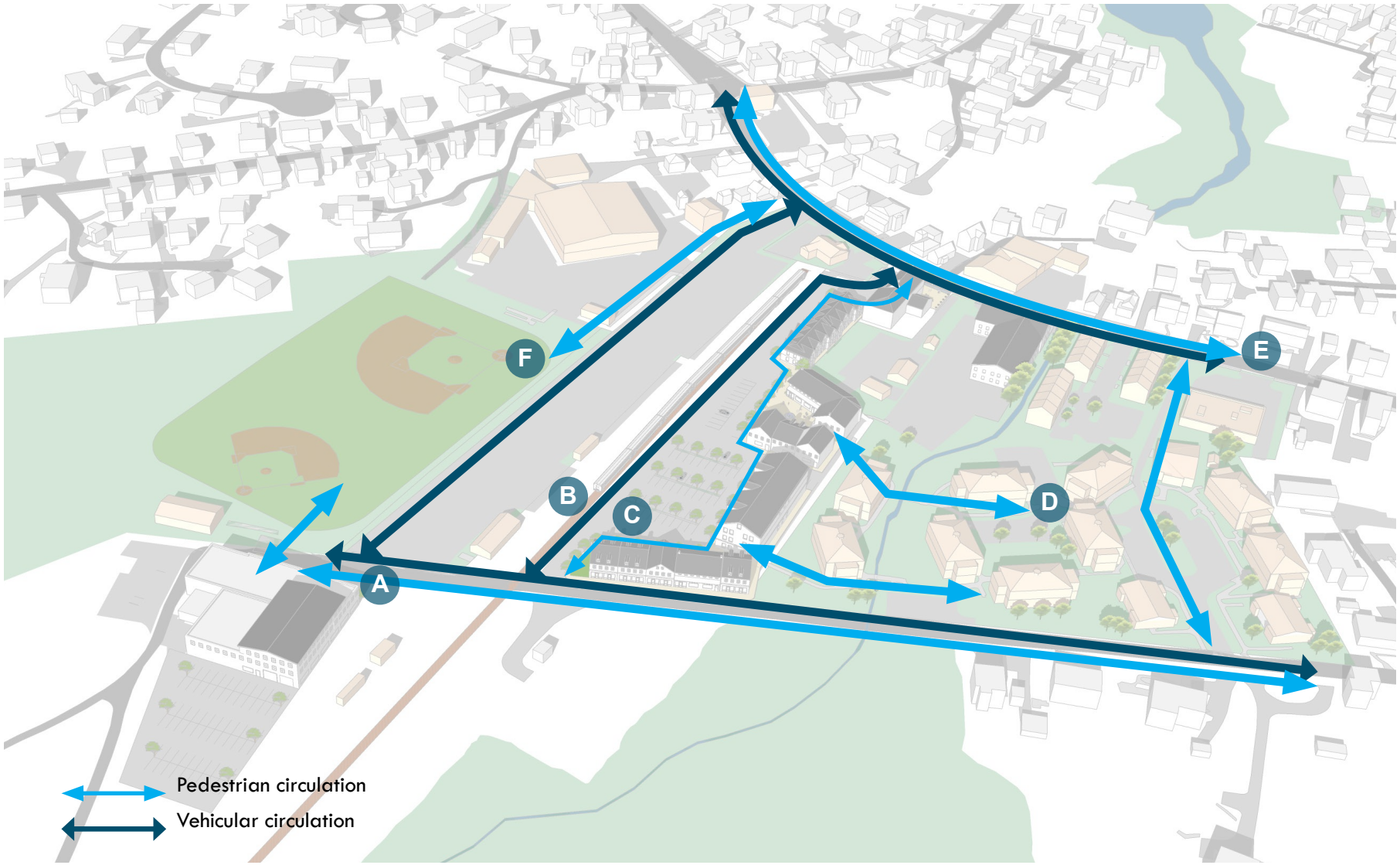
C Pedestrian connectivity provides full connection between Railroad Avenue and Pooles Lane

D Future development allows for pedestrian connectivity with existing residential development

E Wayfinding and pedestrian improvements connecting the station area and downtown

F Enhancements to improve the connectivity and accessibility of Evans Field

Figure 34. Potential locations for various housing typologies in the study area.



Illustrative plan development summary

The illustrative plan points to a transformation of the station area into a vibrant, mixed-use neighborhood. It acts as a gateway for people arriving by train, while also complementing the existing downtown by providing a distinct neighborhood focused on local needs.

This plan envisions a near-term redevelopment of several parcels (Table 2). These parcels today contain 27,200 square feet (SF) of commercial space, 23,000 SF of industrial space, and no housing. The plan includes a slight reduction of commercial space on these parcels to 20,700 SF with industrial space remaining the same. The reduction in commercial space reflect broader trends, as well as existing vacancy on-site. The biggest change is the addition of housing, totaling 87 units, changing the building makeup from 0% housing to 64%.

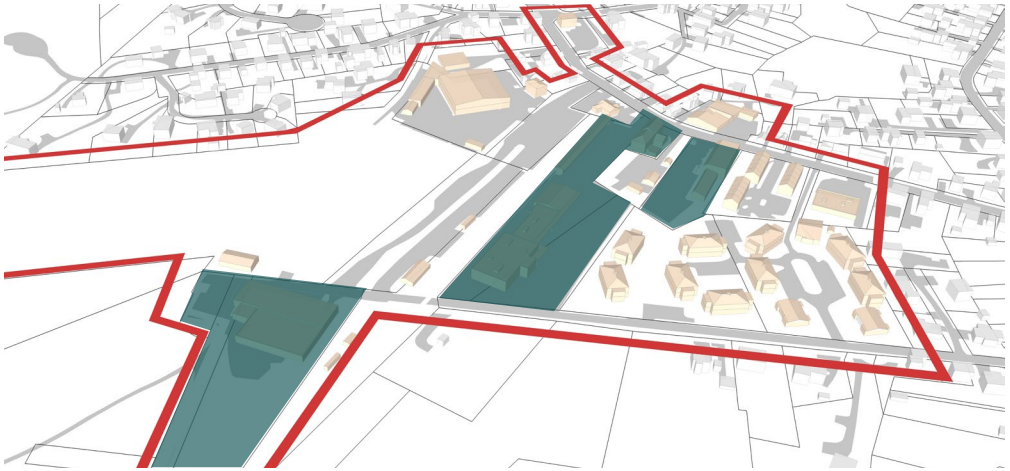
Table 2. Illustrative plan land use summary (redeveloped parcels only)

REDEVELOPED PARCELS ONLY

	Existing		Future (Phase 1)	
Residential Units	0		87	
Residential: SF | %	0	0%	78,700	64%
Commercial: SF' | %	27,200	54%	20,700	17%
Industrial: SF' | %	23,000	46%	23,000	19%

*For modeling purposes, the illustrative plan assumed average unit size of 1,000 square feet.

Blue highlights indicate the parcels used for the calculations above.



Examining the redeveloped parcels in the context of the entire study area provides a better picture of the future neighborhood (Table 3). In the study area there currently is approximately 95,500 SF of commercial space, 28,000 SF of industrial space, and approximately 95 housing units (i.e., the senior housing complex and townhouses). According to the illustrative plan commercial space reduces to 89,000 SF and industrial space remains the same. Total residential units in the study area becomes 182, bringing residential to 51% of the total built area.

As noted above, this plan is for illustrative purposes to show future potential based upon the Town's visioning process and community feedback. It aims to provide a realistic scenario based upon various site constraints, parking requirements, and building sizes. A zoning by-law can be drafted to allow for this type of development; however, individual land-owners maintain discretion on whether and how to develop their properties, working within the constraints of the Town's by-laws and regulations.

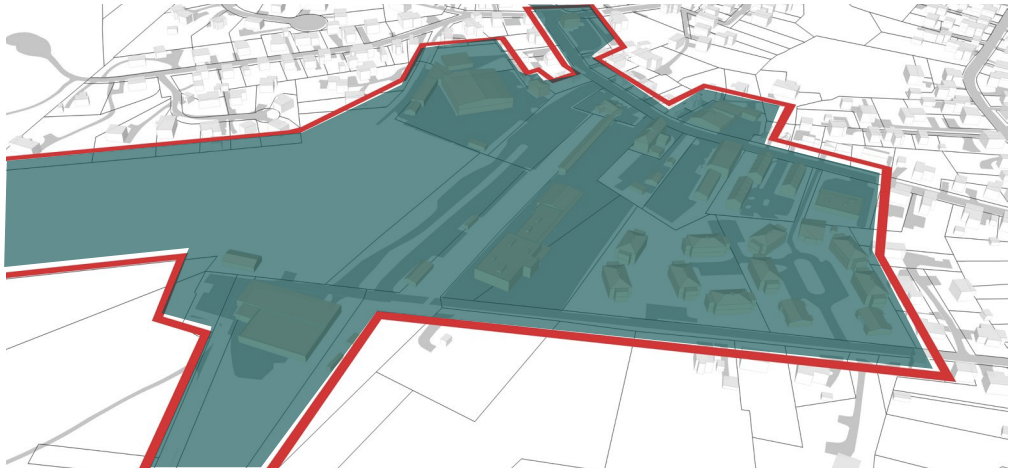
Table 3. Illustrative plan land use summary (entire study area)

TOTAL STUDY AREA

	Existing		Future (Phase 1)	
Residential Units	95		182	
Residential: SF | %	44,600	27%	94,000	51%
Commercial: SF | %	95,500	57%	89,000	37%
Industrial: SF | %	28,000	17%	28,000	12%

*For modeling purposes, the illustrative plan assumed average unit size of 1,000 square feet.

Blue highlights indicate the parcels used for the calculations above.



Off-Street Parking

Because development in transit-oriented, mixed-use, walkable districts have unique characteristics, they often have separate parking requirements specific to the district. Existing parking requirements in Rockport's by-laws apply, however, town-wide. The illustrative plan incorporates parking requirements generally considered more appropriate for a TOD district in a small-town context. These include:

Reduced minimum requirements

The Town's parking requirement for multi-family and townhouses is 1.5 spaces for each dwelling unit. This is generally considered a best practice in the region's suburbs and was not altered in the TOD area; however, the existing parking requirements for retail, restaurants, office, and other non-commercial uses, is generally higher than best practices in similar contexts. For example, retail stores and offices require 1 parking space per 180 square feet of ground floor plus 1 space for each 300 square feet of upper floor plus 1 space for each employee working at a given time. For purposes of the Concept Plan, MAPC utilized 4 spaces per 1,000 square feet of commercial space, which is a best practice in similar contexts.

Shared parking

The illustrative plan envisions the station area as a vibrant, mixed-use environment. Because people tend to park at different times of day depending on the use, mixed-use projects often can take advantage of reduced parking needs. The Town's by-laws, however, require each use on a parcel to be counted separately. The illustrative plan incorporates a shared-parking mechanism, similar to that used in several other communities in the region, whereby a percentage is assigned to each land use at different times of day. The minimum parking requirement for each individual use is multiplied by the appropriate percentage for each time period. Totals for each column are summed and the highest value is the minimum shared parking space requirement for that combination of land uses. Given the adjacent parking lots (Town-owned and MBTA), a shared-parking arrangement is even more feasible, as off-peak times will have a suitable overflow location. The illustrative plan applies these concepts at the Whistlestop Mall as a test.[8] See Tables 4 and 5.

[8]As an alternate mechanism, some communities allow developers to "count" spaces in nearby public lots to offset a portion of the required spaces. Other communities allow developers to reduce parking requirements by contributing to a "payment-in-lieu" fund that could be used for parking management strategies or other uses.

Table 4. Sample Parking Credit Schedule Chart

Parking Credit Schedule Chart					
	Weekday		Weekend		
Uses	Night Midnight to 7:00 a.m.	Day 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.	Evening 5:00 p.m. to Midnight	Day 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.	Evening 6:00 p.m. to Midnight
	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)
Residential	1	0.6	0.9	0.8	0.9
Office/industrial	0.05	1	0.05	0.1	0.05
Commercial retail	0.05	0.8	0.9	1	0.7
Hotel	0.7	0.7	1	0.7	1
Restaurant	0.1	0.5	1	0.5	1
Day-care facilities	0.05	1	0.1	0.2	0.05
All other	1	1	1	1	1

Table 5. Applying shared parking mechanism to hypothetical redevelopment of Whistlestop Mall as part of illustrative plan

Parking Credit Schedule Chart					
	Weekday		Weekend		
Uses	Night Midnight to 7:00 a.m.	Day 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.	Evening 5:00 p.m. to Midnight	Day 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.	Evening 6:00 p.m. to Midnight
	(spaces)	(spaces)	(spaces)	(spaces)	(spaces)
Residential	77	46	70	62	70
Office/industrial	1	28	1	3	1
Commercial retail	1	21	23	26	18
Hotel	0	0	0	0	0
Restaurant	1	4	9	4	9
Day-care facilities	0	0	0	0	0
All other	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	81	99	103	95	98

Whistlestop Mall: Summary of Hypothetical Redevelopment and Associated Parking Requirements

The summary below illustrates how a shared parking mechanism, combined with parking requirements appropriate to a TOD area, can appropriately meet the needs of future development. The illustrative plan envisions 46 residential units in townhouses, mixed-use buildings, and a multi-family building, along with office and retail space. With a shared parking mechanism, total spaces modeled (107) exceeds the requirements (103).

Land use program:

- **Residential units:** 46
- **Office space:** 6,970 sq'
- **Retail space:** 8,670 sq'

Parking requirements:

- **Parking spaces with reduced requirements, no shared parking:** 140
- **Parking spaces with reduced requirements and shared parking:** 103
- ***Actual parking spaces provided in model:*** *107*

Assumptions:

1) Ground-floor of buildings along Pooles Lane classified as office space.

2) Retail space for additional buildings split 25% restaurant, 75% other retail.

3) For simplification purposes, 4 spaces per 1,000 square feet was also applied to restaurants and industrial uses.

Integration of Elements

The following diagrams depict the illustrative plan traveling throughout the study area and how various elements can help achieve the Town's vision. Note that the color of the "flags" on the following diagrams correspond to the explanatory descriptions on the facing page.

Location: 13 Railroad Ave (Figure 35)
Residential Units: 16
Commercial Sq': 5,100
Parking Spaces: 39

BUILDING

1. Building oriented toward Railroad Avenue, rather than interior or lot.
2. Two and a half story height more appropriate for TOD area.
3. Commercial uses located on ground floor along Railroad Avenue with additional space for residential.

CONNECTIVITY + PARKING

1. Reduced curb cut improves pedestrian experience and safety.
2. Slope on parcel allows for "tuck-under" parking under portion of building to maximize availability of parking spaces.

Existing conditions

Star indicates location within study area.

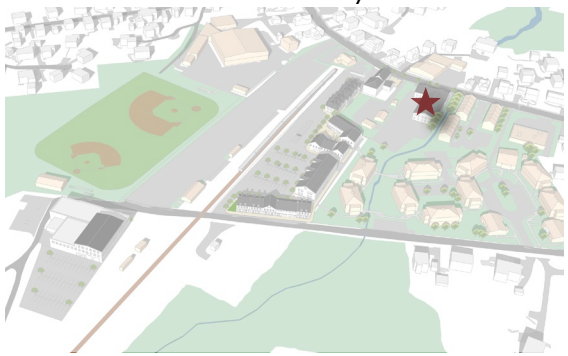


Figure 35. 13 Railroad Avenue

Location: 17 Railroad Ave (Figure 36)
Residential Units: N/A
Commercial Sq': 10,000
Parking Spaces: Included as part of Whistlestop Mall parking

BUILDING

1. Adaptive reuse of existing building.
2. Space retrofitted for restaurant, cafe, or other "active use."

CONNECTIVITY + PARKING

1. Sidewalk improves safety and comfort of pedestrians.
2. Parking moved from front of building to allow for sidewalk construction and outdoor seating. Spaces accommodated at Whistlestop Mall site.

OPEN SPACE

1. Expanded open space creates inviting atmosphere adjacent to Whistlestop Mall and Rockport Station.

Existing conditions

Star indicates location within study area.

Figure 36. 17 Railroad Avenue

Location: Whistlestop Mall (Figure 37)
Residential Units: 8
Commercial Sq': N/A
Parking Spaces: 8 dedicated garage spaces. 107 total spaces on site.

BUILDING

1. Townhouse-style provides additional housing option, especially attractive to young families.
2. Townhouses complement existing townhouses at 11 Railroad Ave.
3. Location provides a connection between Railroad Avenue and additional development within Whistlestop Mall site.

CONNECTIVITY + PARKING

1. One garage parking space provided per townhouse. Additional 4 spaces part of site parking lot.

OPEN SPACE

1. Space for small playground provides additional amenity for families living in the area.
2. Noise from idling trains can be partially mitigated through buffers such as trees, as well as noise barriers containing advanced absorptive materials.

Existing conditions

Star indicates location within study area.

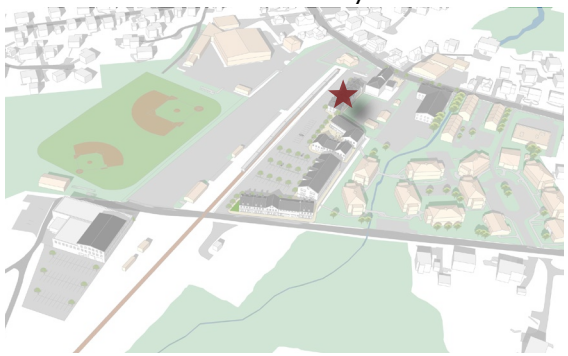


Figure 37. Whistlestop Mall: townhouses

Location: Whistlestop Mall (Figure 38)
Residential Units: 13
Commercial Sq': 8,700
Parking Spaces: 107 total spaces on site.

BUILDING

1. Buildings organized around plaza provide an attractive pedestrian environment.
2. Ground-floor retail can include cafes, restaurants, beer+wine store, and other shops.

CONNECTIVITY + PARKING

1. Location of parking provides buffer between development and train.
2. Pedestrian-scale lighting, street trees, and wide sidewalks all contribute to an attractive, walkable realm.
3. Buildings oriented to allow for connection with adjacent senior housing complex.

OPEN SPACE

1. Plaza is an amenity that provides a distinct sense of place and provides seating for residents and visitors.

Existing conditions

Star indicates location within study area.

Figure 38. Whistlestop Mall: plaza and mixed-use buildings

Location: Whistlestop Mall (Figure 39)
Residential Units: 31
Commercial Sq': 3,600
Parking Spaces: 107 total spaces on site.

GENERAL

1. Multifamily building increases supply of affordable housing.

BUILDING

1. Larger building located on interior of site, largely hidden from Pooles Lane.
2. Commercial space, potentially office, along Pooles Lane.

CONNECTIVITY + PARKING

1. Location of parking provides buffer between development and train.
2. Shared parking mechanism allow for adequate parking without limiting development potential.
3. Trees can "soften" the negative aesthetic effect of the parking lot, while providing a further buffer from the train.

Existing conditions

Star indicates location within study area.

Figure 39. Whistlestop Mall: multi-family, parking lot, and commercial buildings

Location: 31 Pooles Lane (Figure 40)
Residential Units: 17
Commercial / Industrial Sq': 22,000
Parking Spaces: 53

BUILDING

1. Footprint of original building maintained to allow for existing functions to continue.
2. Deep stepback (>30') allows for additional height away from Pooles Lane to increase number of residences.

CONNECTIVITY + PARKING

1. Improved access to Evans Field
2. Sidewalks along Pooles Lane

Existing conditions

Star indicates location within study area.

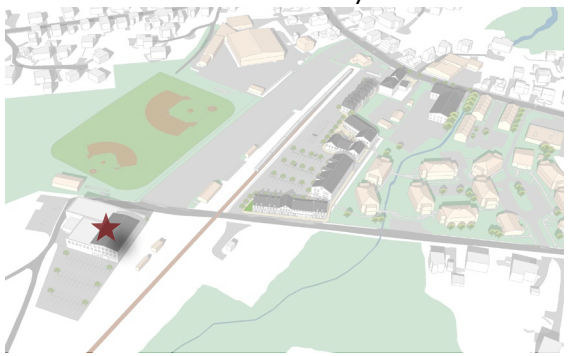


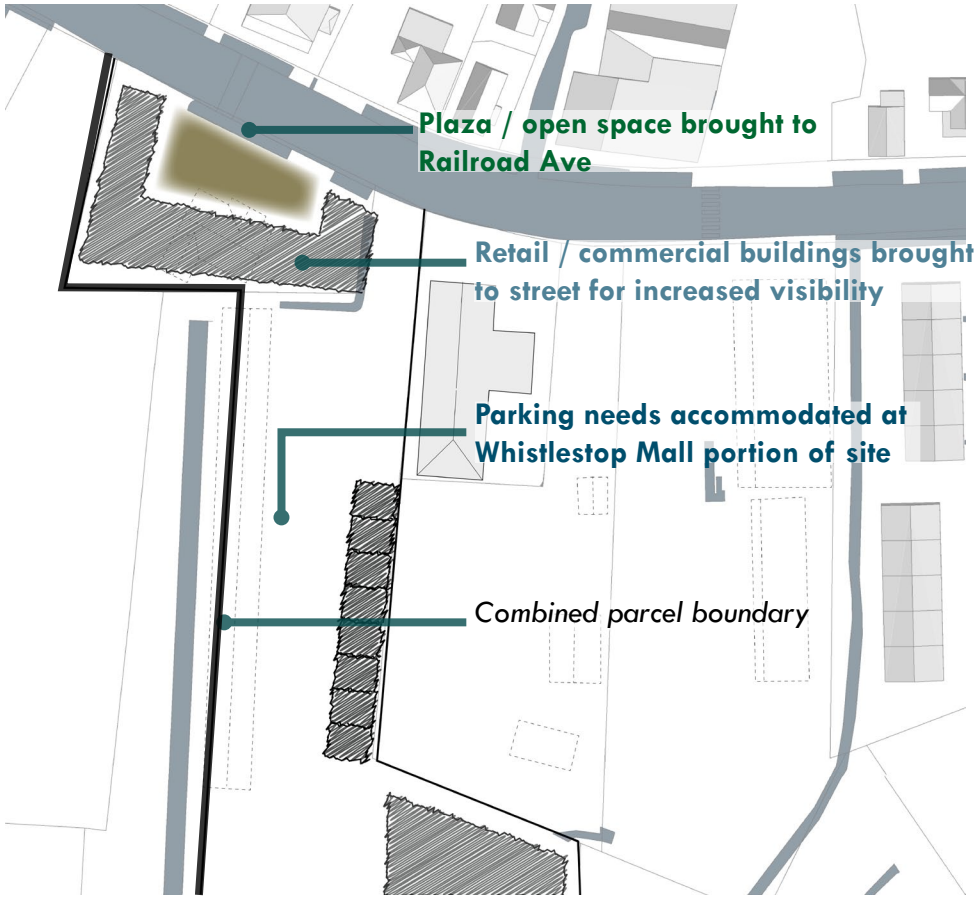
Figure 40. 31 Pooles Lane

Alternatives

The illustrative plan provides one example of how development could occur. The specifics on any one parcel could change based on a number of factors. For example, increasing unit size would likely mean fewer units built. Furthermore, the plan assumes near-term development based on existing parcels. If property owners combined parcels, development could take place in a variety of other ways.

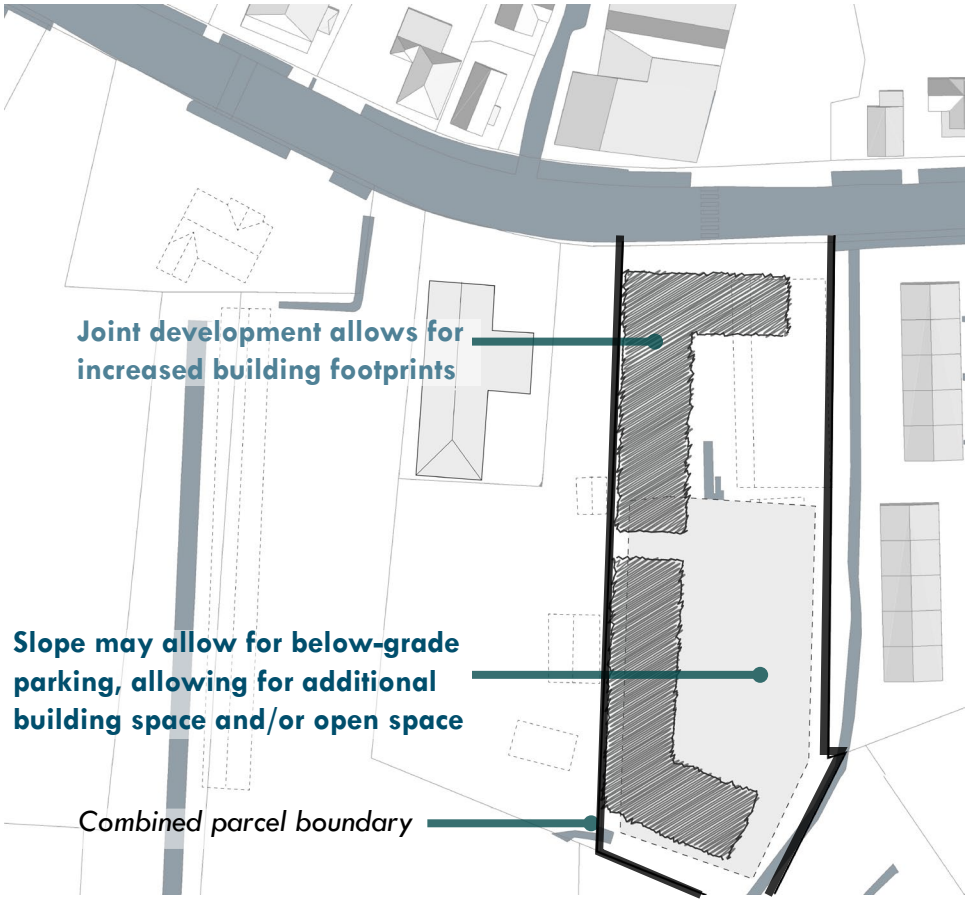
For example, the existing Dunkin Donuts in front of the station platform constrains how development at Whistlestop Mall (Figure 41) could occur. If the owners jointly developed their land, a more cohesive type of development could occur, such as bringing the retail space and open space amenity (i.e., plaza) closer to Railroad Avenue. This would greatly increase the retail's visibility and create a stronger "gateway" from the station.

Figure 41. Example if Dunkin Donuts and Whistlestop Mall jointly developed


Plaza / open space brought to Railroad Ave
Retail / commercial buildings brought to street for increased visibility
Parking needs accommodated at Whistlestop Mall portion of site
Combined parcel boundary

Another alternative could be jointly developing 15 Railroad Avenue (Todd Oil Company) with 13 Railroad Avenue (Figure 42). This would allow for a strong street frontage with retail and other commercial space along Railroad Avenue. The parcels' slope could allow for tuck-in parking below, including potentially enough space to accommodate on-site uses, as well as to accommodate parking for nearby parcels.

Figure 42. Example if Todd Oil property jointly developed with 13 Railroad Ave


Joint development allows for increased building footprints
Slope may allow for below-grade parking, allowing for additional building space and/or open space
Combined parcel boundary

DO NOT
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Paul Revere Transportation

ENHANCING OPTIONS FOR COMMUTERS

The illustrative plan includes a number of components that can create a vibrant neighborhood, attractive to existing residents, as well as new, year-round residents. An additional consideration for where people choose to live is their commute to work. Rockport's location can pose a challenge to attracting more year-round residents, as it is relatively far from the employment hub of Boston and the hubs along Route 128 (Burlington, Waltham, etc.). There are, however, a number of smaller employment hubs closer to Rockport, and its commuter rail is relatively well-utilized (details below). This section provides background information on Rockport's transportation system, and potential improvements.

Existing Rockport Transit Services

Rockport's existing transit services include fixed route bus and commuter rail service. The MBTA operates 15 inbound commuter rail trips (to Boston) and 15 outbound train trips (from Boston) on weekdays, from approximately 5 AM to midnight. During the morning and evening peak periods, train service is approximately every hour each direction, with mid-day service every 90 minutes. Although the trip to Boston can take approximately an hour, Rockport Station is relatively well-utilized.

According to the MBTA's most recently available data, typical daily boardings were 323.[9] For comparison, this was higher than Manchester-by-the-Sea (307), Beverly Farms (207), North Beverly (292), and others. Daily boardings were far smaller than some of the major stations along the line, such as Gloucester (590), Beverly (2,058), Salem (2,122), and others. For the entire Rockport-Newburyport line, Rockport Station is in the middle in terms of number of boardings (9 out of 18). This may suggest that transit-oriented development, appropriately scaled, could be supported.

The Cape Ann Transportation Authority (CATA) operates three year-round bus routes (Red, Green and Blue lines) that serve Rockport and connect to downtown Gloucester. In Gloucester, riders can connect with other CATA lines serving Gloucester and a shuttle connecting to the North Shore Mall (Peabody) and Liberty Tree Mall (Danvers). CATA also operates a Green Line "Rockport Loop" service during tourism season that connects remote parking in Rockport with downtown and the beach.[10]

CATA bus services operate Monday through Friday, with weekday frequencies ranging from hourly to every two hours. Saturday services have fewer frequencies. CATA also offers dial-a-ride service for seniors (over 60) and the disabled adults (over 18).[11] Eligible trips are only within CATA's Rockport/Gloucester service area. CATA also provides seniors weekly shopping trips

[9] Ridership and Service Statistics. (Fourteenth Edition. 2014.) MBTA.

[10] http://www.canntran.com/routes.cfm.

[11] http://www.canntran.com/services.cfm

from Rockport to Gloucester, coordinated through the Rockport Council on Aging.[12]

Rockport pays approximately $90,000 in annual assessment to CATA for the fixed route bus and dial-a-ride services. Rockport does not pay an assessment to the MBTA.

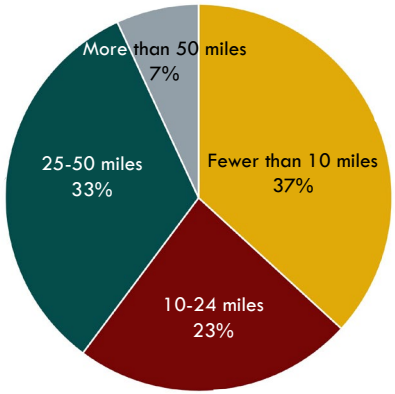
Existing Rockport Commuting and Employment Patterns

To better understand the current commuting patterns of Rockport residents and workers, MAPC utilized the US Census OnTheMap website for the Rockport Census Designated Place (CDP) (Figure 43). Approximately 37% of workers living in Rockport commute fewer than 10 miles, mainly within Rockport and to Gloucester (Figure 44). Around 23% commute to other locations southwest (between 10 and 24 miles), while around one-third commute more than 25 miles to Boston and beyond. Around 22% commute to Gloucester, while 11 percent work within the town of Rockport. Around eight percent each commute to Beverly and Boston. Nearly 50% commute to other locations. Around 79% of residents drive to work, while around seven percent take transit.

For jobs within Rockport, nearly three-fourths of workers commute fewer than 10 miles, and nearly 60 percent are commuters from within Rockport or from Gloucester.

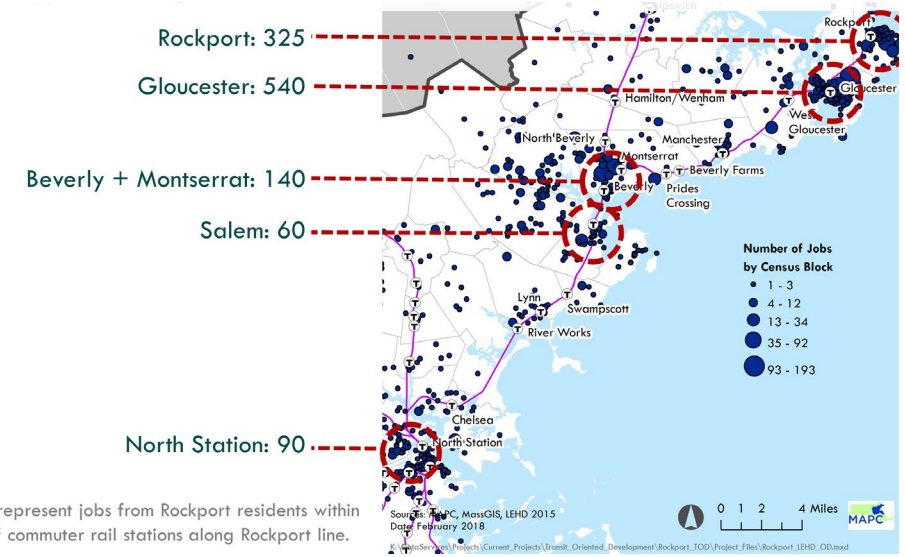
[12]https://www.rockportma.gov/council-aging

Figure 43. Commute distance for Rockport residents. Forty-percent travel more than 25 miles to work, suggesting they're willing to have longer commutes to live in the Town.



Source: US Census Bureau and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics, 2002-2015

Figure 44. Number of Rockport residents working within a mile of stations along Rockport line, comprising more than 1/3 of workers, suggest potential for increased transit utilization.



*Numbers represent jobs from Rockport residents within one mile of commuter rail stations along Rockport line.

Rockport Transit Challenges

Transit services in Rockport are challenging for those who do not always commute during standard hours. There is no bus service before 7 AM and after 6 PM, and no weekday bus services beyond Gloucester. As described above, buses and commuter rail services also run infrequently, with only hourly service in the peak and 90 minutes between trains during the mid-day. Moreover, there is limited transit connectivity in Rockport, as CATA bus and MBTA commuter rail schedules are not always coordinated to ensure good connections. For example, only the CATA Blue Line currently serves the Rockport commuter rail station, with one morning trip (6:44 AM) three afternoon trips, and with no trips after 4 PM.

There are currently no bicycle share or car share services within Town. Rockport also has almost no ride-hailing (Uber, Lyft, taxis) services in Town; only one taxi service is listed with a Rockport address, and Rockport registered only 1,253 ride-hailing trips in 2017, the fewest of any community within the North Shore.[13] (A limo service is available.)

Recent Recommendations for Improved Transit Services

Improved transit services in Rockport can support equitable transit oriented development, particularly with connections around Rockport and mid-day transit services to employment and other destinations to the south. The CATA 2015 Regional Transit Plan recommended realigning the CATA Green and Blue bus routes to better serve the Rockport commuter rail station, as well as improved weekday frequencies (every 30 minutes for the Green route, every hour for Blue), as well as longer service in the evening and weekends. These bus route improvements would better connect the downtowns of Rockport and Gloucester.

A 2017 study by MAPC also recommended more local transit services; for example, given the lack of taxi and ride hailing services in Rockport, the study recommended creation of a municipally operated on-demand shuttle that could serve local employment, shopping and medical trips, as well as a bike share pilot program.

The 2017 study also recommended prioritizing complete street connections from the commuter rail station to employment areas within a 10 to 15 minute walk, and the creation of a mobility hub at the Rockport station that would include signage showing destinations within walking distance, a future bike share station, and clearer pickup/drop off connections for CATA and future bus services.

Other Mobility Concepts to Consider Supporting TOD

Given Rockport's desire to not only improve mobility but also support equitable TOD around the Rockport commuter rail station, better connections to employment

[13]See 2017 summary of all TNC trips by municipality at https://www.mapc.org/resource-library/tnc-dpu-funds/

and other destinations outside of Rockport are needed.

New Bus Services

Improved bus and shuttle services from Rockport to Gloucester and Beverly could be a first step in establishing service to support development around the station. Unlike commuter rail, new bus service can be initiated by the Town and thus has fewer obstacles than service expansions provided by the MBTA. The bus service could initially be during the mid-day to supplement the 90 minute frequencies on the current commuter rail service. This service would allow Rockport residents to reach employment, shopping and entertainment in and around downtown Gloucester and downtown Beverly, as well as connect with MBTA bus and more frequent commuter rail services in Beverly.

The operating costs of a new bus service depends on the number of trips and number of service hours to make these trips. A one-way bus trip from Rockport to Gloucester and terminating in downtown Beverly will likely be 40 to 45 minutes. Six hours of service, with two or three round weekday trips, would cost approximately $160,000 annually. The cost of this new service would be more than double the Town's current CATA's annual assessment of $90,000. In discussions with CATA, one idea would be to make the service a flexible fixed route that would pick up eligible senior and disabled passengers in Rockport and possibly Gloucester and take them to medical appointments (after stopping at the Beverly depot and downtown Beverly to allow connections to MBTA bus and commuter rail). This combined senior/medical and general public flexible fixed route service could be partially funded via Federal Transit Administration 5310 funds and MassDOT Mobility Assistance Program funds.

Better Rail Service

More frequent commuter rail service, such as increasing frequencies to at least every 30 minutes in the peak and every 45 to 60 minutes in the off-peak, would be service that would best support new transit oriented development around the Rockport station. Rail services are viewed by developers and residents as more permanent and with more reliable travel times than bus services.

In 2018 and 2019, MassDOT and the MBTA is undertaking a Rail Vision study that will evaluate additional rail service options for the entire commuter rail network. The extent and timing of any changes to the commuter rail services to Rockport are unknown. Moreover, any changes likely would not begin until at least 2022 when MBTA's new commuter rail operating contract begins.

Other Active Transportation Options

Given that the largest number of workers living in Rockport commute either within the Town or to Gloucester, creating additional connections from the Rockport station area to destinations in the Town and to Gloucester should be beneficial. Such connections will also help with the significant number of tourists who visit the Town. These include a bike share program, a "micro-mobility" pilot with for-rent battery powered scooters and bicycles, and prioritization of complete street and trail connections from the station to concentrated areas of employment and tourist destinations.

Rockport Station Area Transit-Oriented Village Plan

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementing the vision requires a multi-pronged approach that includes regulatory changes, public realm improvements, public investment, and private redevelopment. The following recommendations provide an overview for implementing the vision.

Zoning

As discussed in Zoning and Land Use of the Background Section, existing zoning in the study area is not conducive to fostering a traditional New England village. Accompanying this report is draft text to amend Rockport's Zoning By-Laws. After discussion with Planning Board members, an overlay district was deemed the most appropriate way to amend the zoning. The benefits to this approach are:

1. The underlying zoning districts remain in place (i.e., Semi-Residential or Residential), and landowners do not need to fear that their property is no longer in conformance; instead, properties within the overlay district will have the option of developing through the underlying zoning or the overlay district.

2. Following the model of Rockport's Open Space Residential Design district, the overlay district is primarily self-contained, meaning almost all requirements can be found in one section of the zoning by-law, adding clarity and simplification for would-be developers.

Because landowners could develop their properties under the underlying zoning, which in this case is generally not conducive to TOD, a drawback to this approach is that future development may not comport with the Town's vision. Changing the underlying zoning would ensure that new development is in line with the vision; however, changing the underlying zoning can be more difficult politically. In addition, development utilizing the overlay district allows for higher-value and denser development (e.g., mixed-use with lower parking requirements) than is permitted with underlying zoning. The financial/market incentive, therefore, could likely persuade landowners to develop under the overlay district.

The draft zoning utilized is a hybrid between traditional, "Euclidean" zoning and a newer approach, known as "form-based codes." The approach still contains allowable uses and various other requirements, but it also goes beyond typical dimensional regulations of height, setbacks, and lot coverage with a greater degree of detail on building form. Because the Town is interested in maintaining its unique character, the form-based approach provides greater clarity to landowners on the form of buildings, while still providing flexibility to develop according to their tastes and market needs. The overlay district is intended to be written in a manner accessible to lay people and includes diagrams to further increase clarity. While site plan review is required for development under the overlay district, a number of uses and building types are allowed by right, which can help reduce uncertainty and risk for landowners.

The overlay district, tentatively titled "Transit-Oriented Village Overlay District" ("TOV"), includes a number of

elements to help implement the Town's vision. The district contains a number of allowable uses, either by-right or through Special Permit. Chief among these uses is the allowance for a greater number of dwelling units than currently is allowed in the by-laws.

Differing from traditional zoning is a section on building standards (Figure 45). This allows, either by-right or through Special Permit, a number of building types that are allowed in the district, including mixed-use buildings, townhouses, multifamily buildings, shophouses, and fabrication buildings.

Each building type contains various standards, including heights, fenestration requirements, and other standards. In addition, types of allowable roofs are provided. The zoning also contains "components," such as an extended shopfront, dormers, balconies, etc. Each component has its own standards and each building type allows some combination of the components, either by right or through Special Permit.

The zoning also contains draft language for off-street parking regulations that reflect best practices for a transit-oriented village, including reduced requirements for non-residential uses and a shared parking mechanism.

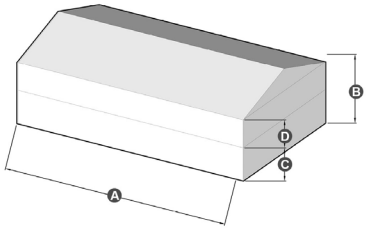
An important component in creating equitable transit-oriented development is ensuring that access to the opportunities of living in such an environment are available to people across a range of incomes. In Rockport, 38% of all households are classified as Low Income (i.e., 80% of area median income), very low income (50% of area median income), or extremely low income (30% of area median income). Furthermore, 53% of renters and 36% of owners are considered "cost-burdened," meaning they spend more than 30% of their income on housing costs.

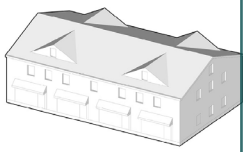
While increasing the supply of moderately-priced housing is part of the solution, deed-restricted housing is another important piece of the puzzle. Rockport does not have an inclusionary zoning by-law that would require a certain percentage of housing to be deemed affordable according to the state. Massachusetts maintains a subsidized housing inventory (SHI) that tracks each municipality's affordable housing stock, including deed restricted and subsidized units. Under General Law Chapter 40B, in any municipality where less than 10% of units are included on the SHI, a developer can build more densely than the municipal zoning bylaws would permit, if at least 25% (or 20% in certain cases) of the new units are affordable. In Rockport, only 3.9% of housing stock meets the SHI requirement. While a town-wide inclusionary zoning by-law may be ideal, the area around a station is especially important to contain affordable housing, as a low income population is more likely to be "transit-dependent." The proposed zoning requires projects of a certain size to include 10% of units to comply with affordable housing requirements.

Finally, the TOV requires projects of a certain size to contain a minimum percentage of usable, publicly available open space.

Figure 45. Examples from proposed transit-oriented village overlay district.

e. MIXED-USE BUILDING





Description
A variably-sized building with ground-floor retail space and multiple units of residential space.

Building Form

Building length	100' max	A
Building height	2.5 stories, 30'	B
First floor height	11' min, 15' max	C
Upper floor height	9' min, 12' max	D

Fenestration

First floor fenestration	30% min
Upper floor fenestration	15% min

Standards
1. At least 50% of ground floor must be occupied by commercial uses.

Roofs

Gable	Y
Hipped	Y
Shed	Y
Flat	N

Massing Components

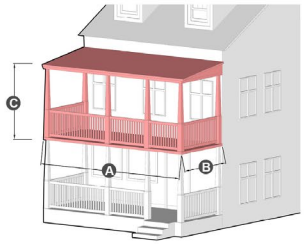
Extended shopfront	Y
Rear addition	Y
Side wing	Y
Step back	SP

Architectural Components

Porch	Y
Gallery	Y
Stoop	Y
Cross Gable	Y
Shed Dormer	Y
Dormer Window	Y
Bay Window	Y
Balcony	Y
Portico	Y
Canopy	Y
Deck	Y
Roof Deck	SP

Y = Permitted by right
SP = Permitted by Special Permit
N = Prohibited

k. GALLERY



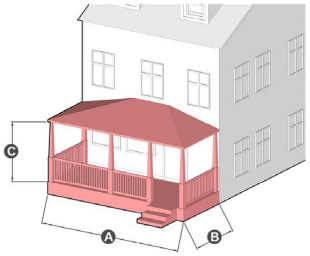
Description
A raised, roofed platform that provides additional living space, with access solely from the interior of the building.

Dimensions

Width	No more than width of the adjoining building face	A
Projection	6' min, 12' max	B
Clear Height	7' min	C
Fenestration	60% min when enclosed	

Standards
1. Galleries may be partially or fully enclosed.
2. Galleries may be projecting or integral.
3. Galleries may wrap around corners to attach to porches, decks, balconies, or other galleries on abutting building faces.

l. PORCH



Description
A raised platform with that stairs that provides access to a building entrance.

Dimensions

Width	No more than width of the adjoining building face	A
Projection	6' min, 12' max	B
Height	7' min	C
Fenestration	60% min when enclosed	

Standards
1. Porches may be partially or fully enclosed.
2. Porches may be projecting, engaged, or integral.
3. Stairs may extend off the front or side of the porch, except when a porch is located on an upper floor in which case the stairs cannot be located along the primary frontage.
4. The space between piles or piers must be enclosed with latticework or similar material, or concealed visually by landscaping on all sides.

6. Roofs

a. The purpose of this section is to provide for buildings that have identifiable roof shapes based on local character.

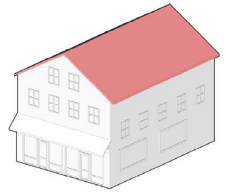
b. Pitched roofs must converge, symmetrically, to a single ridge beam at their highest point.

c. Shed roofs are considered to be symmetrical provided the vertical separation between the base of the eaves and the top of the ridge beam is the same across the entire length of the roof.

d. The following are diagrams and descriptions of allowable roof types in the district. Flat roofs are prohibited except for fabrication buildings.

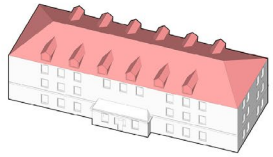
e. Gable Roof

(1) A pitched roof with two sides of the same slop and length, meeting symmetrically at a single ridge-beam.



f. Hipped Roof

(1) A pitched roof with all sides inclined at the same slope, such that they meet symmetrically at a shared ridge beam or a point.



Transfer Station Development

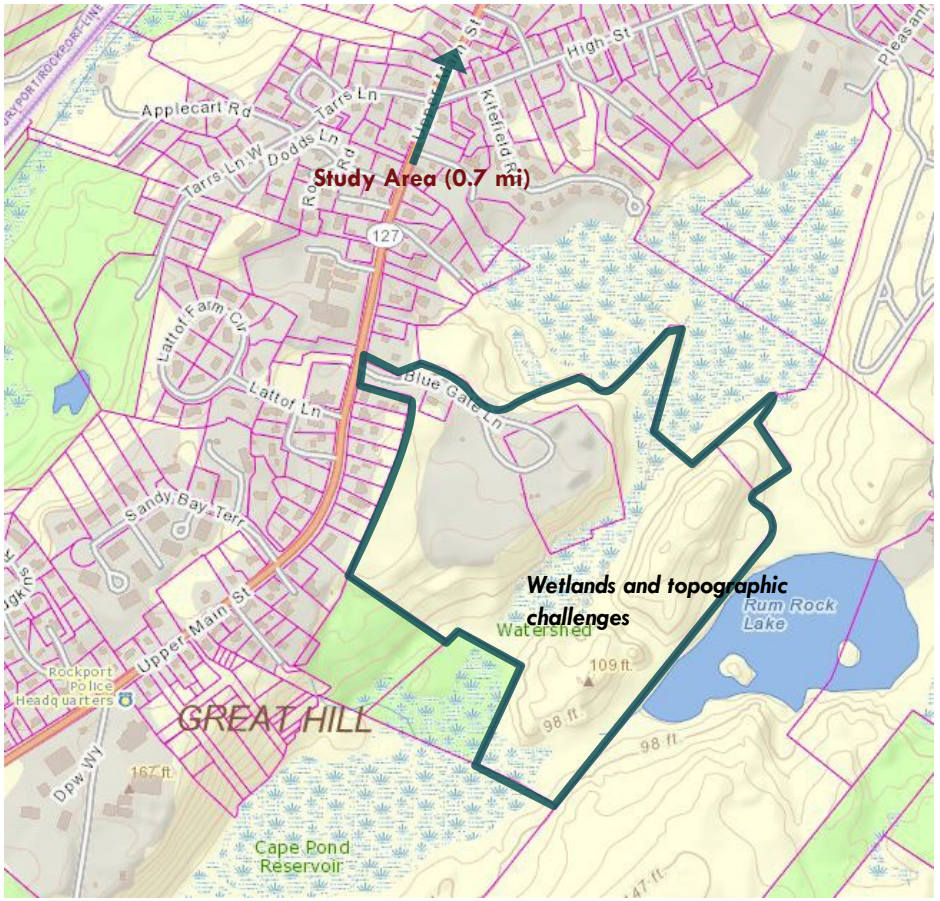
A key concern among stakeholders was finding suitable alternative locations for some existing businesses in the area. In some cases it may be feasible to incorporate existing businesses as part of a redevelopment, depending on space needs and compatibility. In other cases, the businesses may not be compatible as part of a redevelopment and may not benefit from their location next to the station.

The Planning Board has been proactive in searching for alternative sites for these businesses within the community. A potential location would be land at the Town's Transfer Station, its waste and recycling center (Figure 46). While this important use would need to continue, the approximately 40 acre site could also potentially house other industrial and commercial uses.

The site is less than a mile from the station area and is closer to Route 128. Because it is on town-owned land the Town could have the flexibility to lease at terms favorable to businesses, thus incentivizing them to relocate.

The site also has challenges, however, including wetlands and topographic issues. Entering the site requires navigating a curved roadway. While there could potentially be an alternative entry point, an initial examination suggests that would be difficult and expensive, given the distance from other roadways, as well as the wetlands and topographic issues. Instead, there may be opportunities to reduce the existing roadway's curvature and make other improvements to facilitate access. A detailed engineering study would be required.

Figure 46. Transfer Station (blue outline). (Source: Mass Interactive Property Map)



Financing

As noted previously, regional trends suggest there is sufficient market demand for a land use program similar to that provided in the illustrative plan. An additional consideration is whether the return on development is sufficient to justify a change from the status quo existing conditions. While landowners in the study area must perform their own financial due diligence regarding any redevelopment, a high-level assessment suggests that redevelopment in accordance with the proposed zoning could be financially feasible.

The illustrative plan for the Whistlestop Mall property, for example, calls for 8 townhouses, 40 units in multi-family / mixed-use buildings, and approximately 15,600 square feet of commercial space. Total development costs may be approximately $17,000,000. Assuming all rental properties, rental prices per square foot of residential ranging from $1.50 per square foot (affordable townhouse unit) to $2.50 per square foot (one bedroom market rate), and commercial rents at $1.50 per square foot, net cash flow may turn positive after the first year that the development opens (assuming 2 year total construction process).[14]

Redevelopment Options

Individual landowners interested in redeveloping their properties have several options to pursue.

Sale of property

On one end of the spectrum is the option to sell their property to a developer experienced in mixed-use development. The most obvious advantage to this approach is there is little risk related to ensuring the development provides the expected return. Instead, upon selling, the landowner receives an agreed upon price for the property. This is, therefore, the easiest approach and provides a guaranteed return. There are obvious downsides, however. The landowner will be giving up his/her property. He/she will also miss out on both the increased property value resulting from redevelopment and future income streams from rents on the property.

Solo redevelopment

At the other end of the spectrum is the option to pursue redevelopment alone. This has the benefit that all future returns are his/hers alone and he/she retains total control of the property. Potentially, the biggest downside, however, is redevelopment, especially mixed-use, can be a complex and costly process. In addition, a major barrier for many would-be solo developers is the liquid assets needed both for the costs of construction, as well as collateral required by many commercial bank lenders. Finally, the landowner bears all risk. If the market experiences a downtown, if financial projections were off, or if there were unexpected costs, this could prove far more challenging for an individual than a

[14]A high level financial analysis was performed to test whether the zoning will allow for development that may be financially feasible. This analysis relied on numerous assumptions and estimates ranging from unit mix, construction costs, financing details, etc. It also relies on the assumptions from the illustrative plan, which is one example of how development could occur. As noted above, landowners must perform their own due diligence.

larger development firm.

Joint development

A third option is to develop jointly with an experienced developer / development firm. While the drawback is the returns on investment would be shared, there are several benefits to this approach.

An experienced development firm may have a better sense of the market to ensure a successful project. It has the experience to navigate the complex process of redevelopment and has the required financial resources to cover the costs of development.

There are numerous ways a joint development could occur. It is critical that a landowner hires a trusted attorney to negotiate and structure a deal that meets the needs and is fair to all parties. Deals can be structured, for example, where the land owner retains ownership of the land, in essence contributing that asset, which would substantially reduce the development firm's costs if it were to purchase the land.

There are also numerous development firms of various sizes that work in communities of various scales. This can provide the landowner with a multitude of choices to work with a firm with shared interests and values.

In all cases, by adopting a rezoning first, development risk is substantially reduced by increased certainty that a mixed-use and /or higher density development will be approved by the Town. Because of the value and demand for TOD, adopting the zoning also may raise the inherent value of the property.

Phased Approach

It is unlikely that all potential development would take place at once; instead, implementing the vision will take place over time. Generally, some landowners will choose a "wait and see" attitude before committing to redevelopment. By staggering when redevelopment occurs, landowners can gauge market potential. It also allows time for market absorption, i.e., there is often some degree of lag time before tenants move in to a space or future homeowners purchase a home.

Similarly, the Town also has responsibilities to implement the vision, not all of which can be accomplished at once. In a small town with limited staff capacity, it is important to prioritize actions. The following is a recommended prioritization to focus the Town's efforts:

Immediate Term (0 Months -- 1 Year)

- **Adopt zoning**. The proposed zoning overlay district will allow for the type of mixed-use, traditional neighborhood development appropriate to Rockport.
- **Continue to engage with landowners**. The Town has been proactive in working with relevant landowners on the potential for redevelopment. Continued dialogue can help ensure that the needs of these critical stakeholders are being met to ensure a successful future neighborhood.
- **Continue to explore possibility of transfer station for private industrial / commercial uses.** The Planning Board has also been proactive in searching for suitable alternative locations for existing businesses in the station area. An initial concept under consideration is to utilize part of its Transfer Station property for commercial and industrial uses. This innovative approach could allow businesses to continue to operate in Town while making land within the study area available for development more akin to achieving the vision's goals.

Near Term (1 -- 3 Years)

- **Beginning of property redevelopment.** As noted above, the study area would most likely be redeveloped in phases. In the near term, initial properties could be redeveloped. This can occur concurrently while the Town continues to explore viable alternative locations for some study area businesses, assuming that some businesses could be incorporated as part of mixed-use development on-site.
- **Explore sound barriers as part of redevelopment.** Because Rockport is a terminus station, the impacts of noise is an especially acute issue. Advancements in technology focus on sound absorption (as opposed to merely "reflecting" the sound), something especially important, given noise complaints from area neighbors.. While costs vary considerably, high quality sound-absorbing barriers range between $20-27 per square foot. Traditional materials are less expensive.
- **Utilize MassDOT's Complete Streets Program.** The public realm is vitally important for ensuring a walkable, vibrant neighborhood and an area where

the Town has large responsibility. Public realm improvements can be extremely costly, however, and demand always exceeds available resources. MassDOT's Complete Streets Program provides qualified communities with up to $400,000 per year to implement various pedestrian and bicycle improvements. Rockport is enrolled in this program, which could help implement intersection and other improvements around the study area. See www.mass.gov/complete-streets-funding-program for more information.

- **Adopt zoning and other measures in the 1/2 mile around the study area.** The neighborhood around the study can support local businesses and create a cohesive neighborhood. Implementing regulations and other means to attract more residents, especially families, will further help achieve the Town's goals and help ensure the station area's success.

Medium Term (3 -- 7 Years)

- **Implement complete streets plan.** The complete streets program requires several steps, including adoption of a complete streets policy, creation of a prioritization plan (MassDOT will provide up to $50,000 in technical assistance funding), and MassDOT acceptance.
- **Pooles Lane pedestrian facilities.** Whether as part of the complete streets plan or on its own, Pooles Lane should have pedestrian infrastructure such as sidewalks and crosswalks, especially if redevelopment occurs along this roadway.
- **Provide additional bus service for commuters.** Implementing the mobility recommendations in this report will further create a community attractive to working families.
- **If feasible, redevelop transfer station.** Finding an alternative location for existing businesses can help catalyze development in the study area.
- **Additional redevelopment.** If the initial redevelopment is successful, this can create a virtuous cycle that continues to attract reinvestment in the study area and additional properties may be redeveloped.
- **Explore additional development at senior housing complex.** The Town should engage the Rockport Housing Authority to discuss whether there are ways to incorporate additional housing, either market-rate or subsidized, onto its property.

Rockport's station area has tremendous potential to become a vibrant neighborhood attractive to new residents while meeting the needs of existing ones. Combined with other initiatives, redevelopment of the station area presents the opportunity to help meet the Town's current and future goals.